BLACK WIDOW

WELCOME TO THE GAME

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BLACK WIDOW

WELCOME TO THE GAME

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BLACK WIDOW

WELCOME TO THE GAME

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WRITER

BLACK WIDOW: RIGHT TO A LIFE

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LAYOUTS

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DAN BROWN
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VC's CORY PETIT (#1 & #4-6) & **CHRIS ELIOPOULOS** (#2-3)
LETTERERS

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COVER ART

BLACK WIDOW: THE THINGS THEY SAY ABOUT HER...

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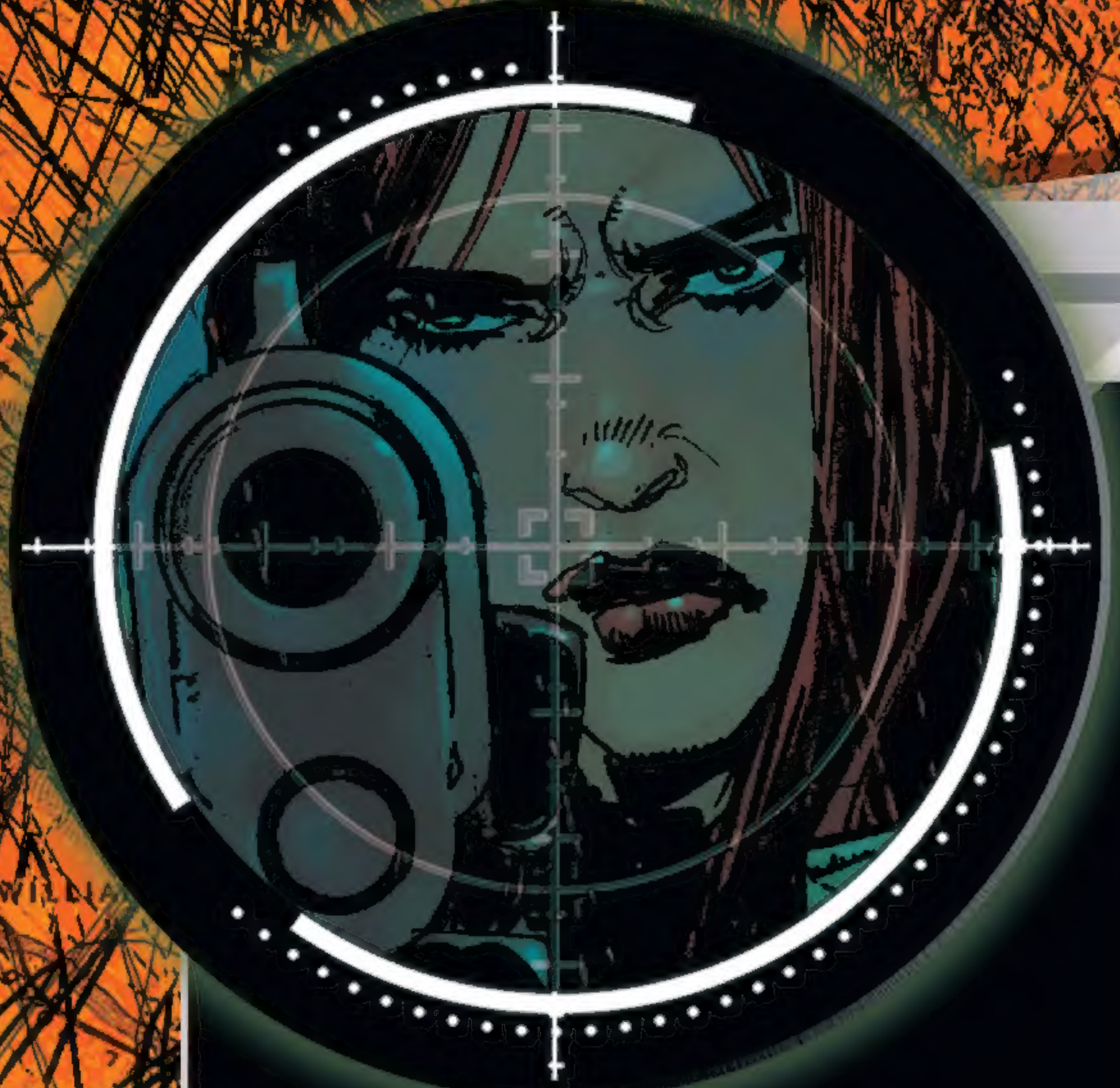
..BLACK WIDOW.



REAL NAME:
Natalya "Natasha" Alianovna Romanova

KNOWN ALIASES:
Natasha Romanov (or Romanoff), Nancy Rushman, Laura Matthers, Oktober, Tsarina, Natalya Shostakova

OCCUPATION:
Intelligence operative (retired), former ballerina

CITIZENSHIP:
Former citizen of the U.S.S.R., U.S.A. resident under extended visa authorized by S.H.I.E.L.D.

PLACE OF BIRTH:
Stalingrad, former U.S.S.R.

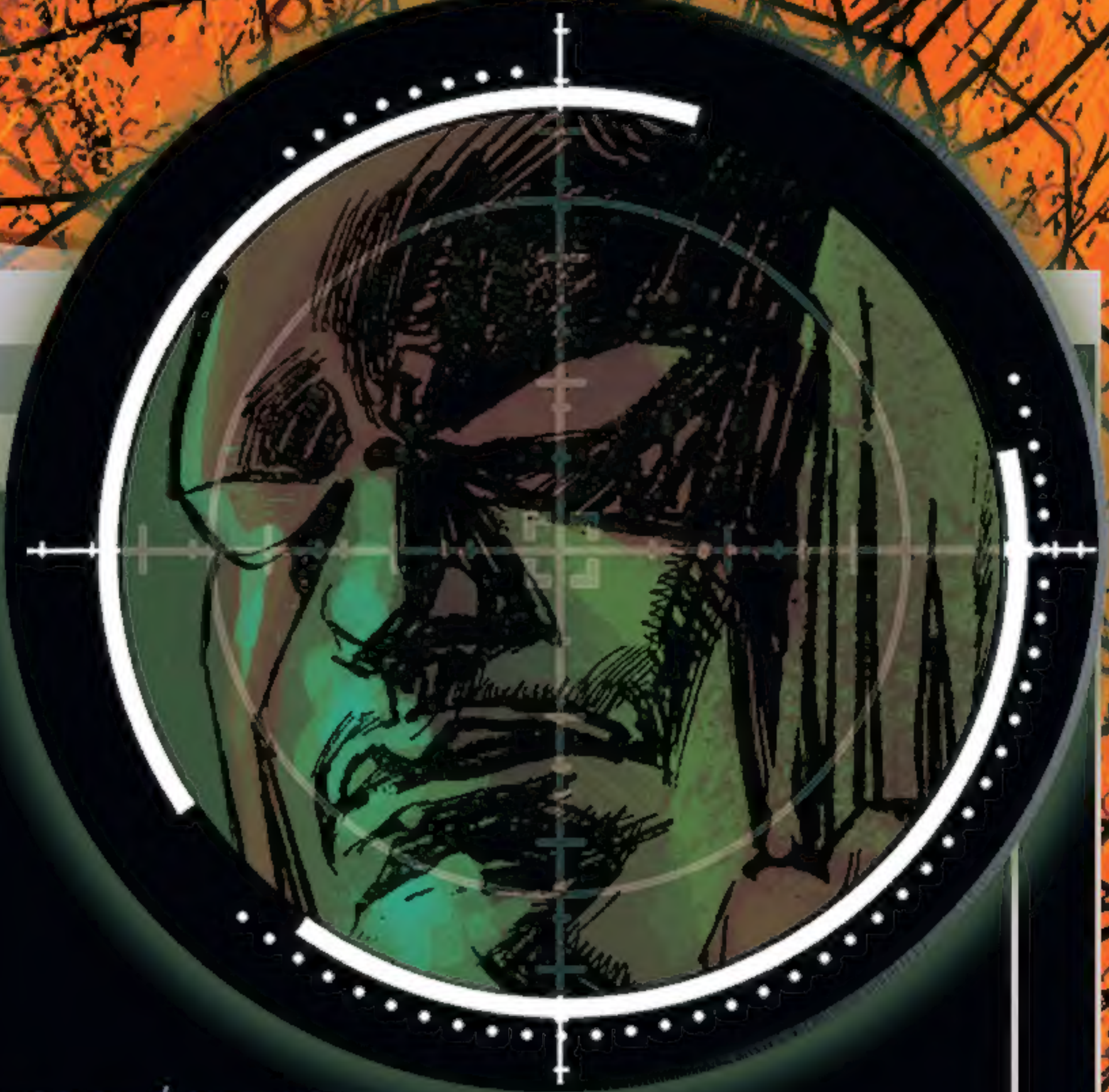
MARITAL STATUS:
Widowed

FIRST APPEARANCE:
Tales of Suspense Vol. 1 #52 (1964)

POWERS/WEAPONS:

- Olympic-level athlete and gymnast
- Master martial artist
- Extensive espionage training and experience
- Wrist cartridges housing tear-gas pellets, a radio transmitter and spring-loaded cable and a small device capable of emitting a high-frequency electrostatic "Widow's Bite"

..DAREDEVIL..



REAL NAME:
Matthew Michael Murdock

KNOWN ALIASES:
Jack Batlin, DD, Kingpin of Crime, Laurent Levasseur, the Man without Fear, Michael "Mike" Murdock, Nameless One, Red Man

OCCUPATION:
Lawyer; former short-order cook

CITIZENSHIP:
U.S.A.

PLACE OF BIRTH:
New York City

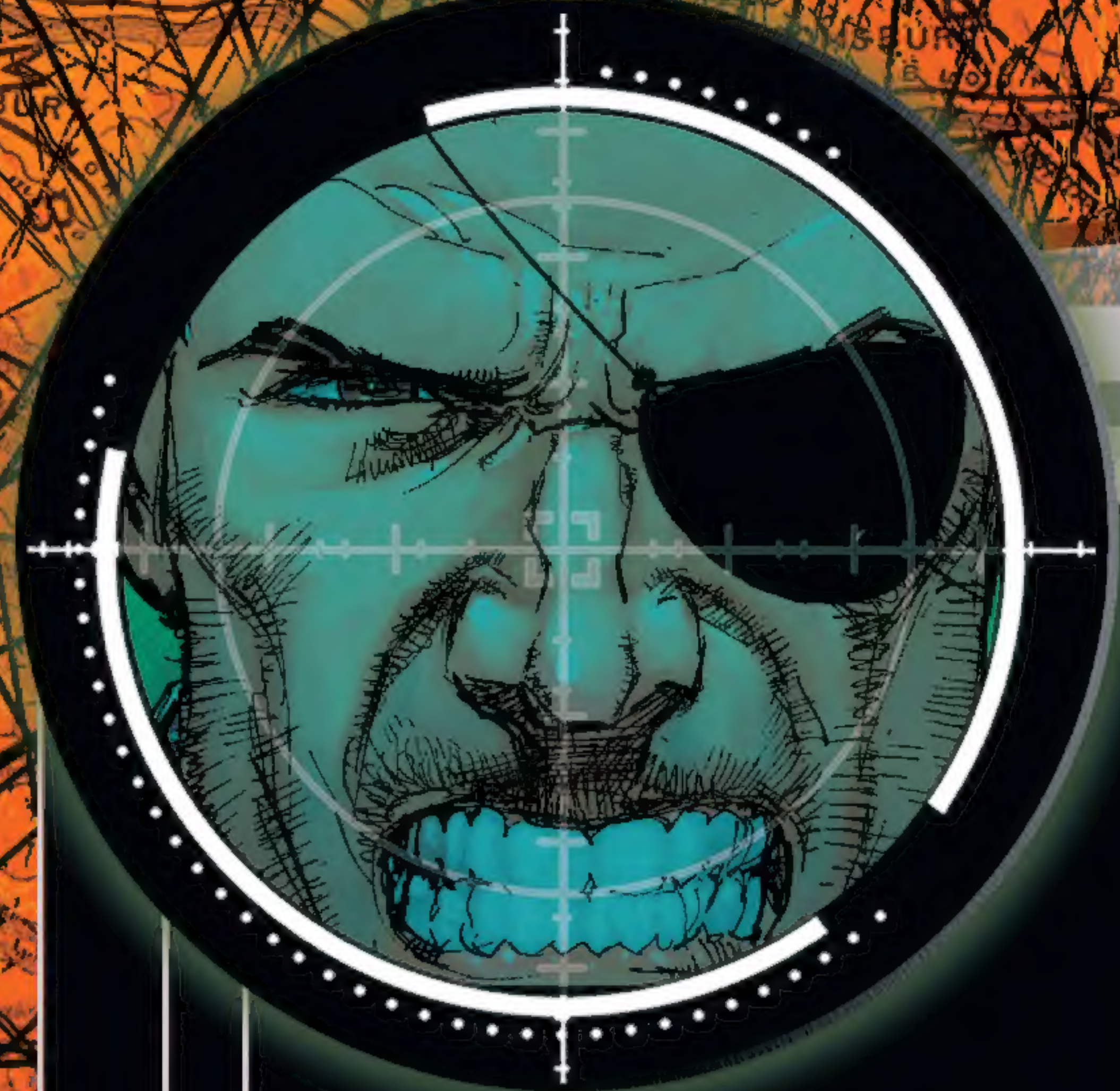
MARITAL STATUS:
Married

FIRST APPEARANCE:
Daredevil Vol. 1 #1 (1964)

POWERS/WEAPONS:

- Super-acute senses of touch, smell, hearing and taste
- "Radar" sense
- Some ninja training
- Olympic-level athlete and gymnast
- Unique fighting style that combines boxing, Ninjitsu, Judo and other martial arts
- Billy club disguised as a blind man's cane

...NICK FURY...



REAL NAME:
Nicholas Joseph Fury

KNOWN ALIASES:
Doyle, the Man in the Mystery Mask, Patch, Scorpio; various others used in espionage

OCCUPATION:
Director of S.H.I.E.L.D. (Strategic Hazard Intervention Espionage Logistics Directorate); former S.H.I.E.L.D. agent, intelligence agent, soldier and commando leader, parachuting instructor, stunt flyer

CITIZENSHIP:
U.S.A.

PLACE OF BIRTH:
New York City

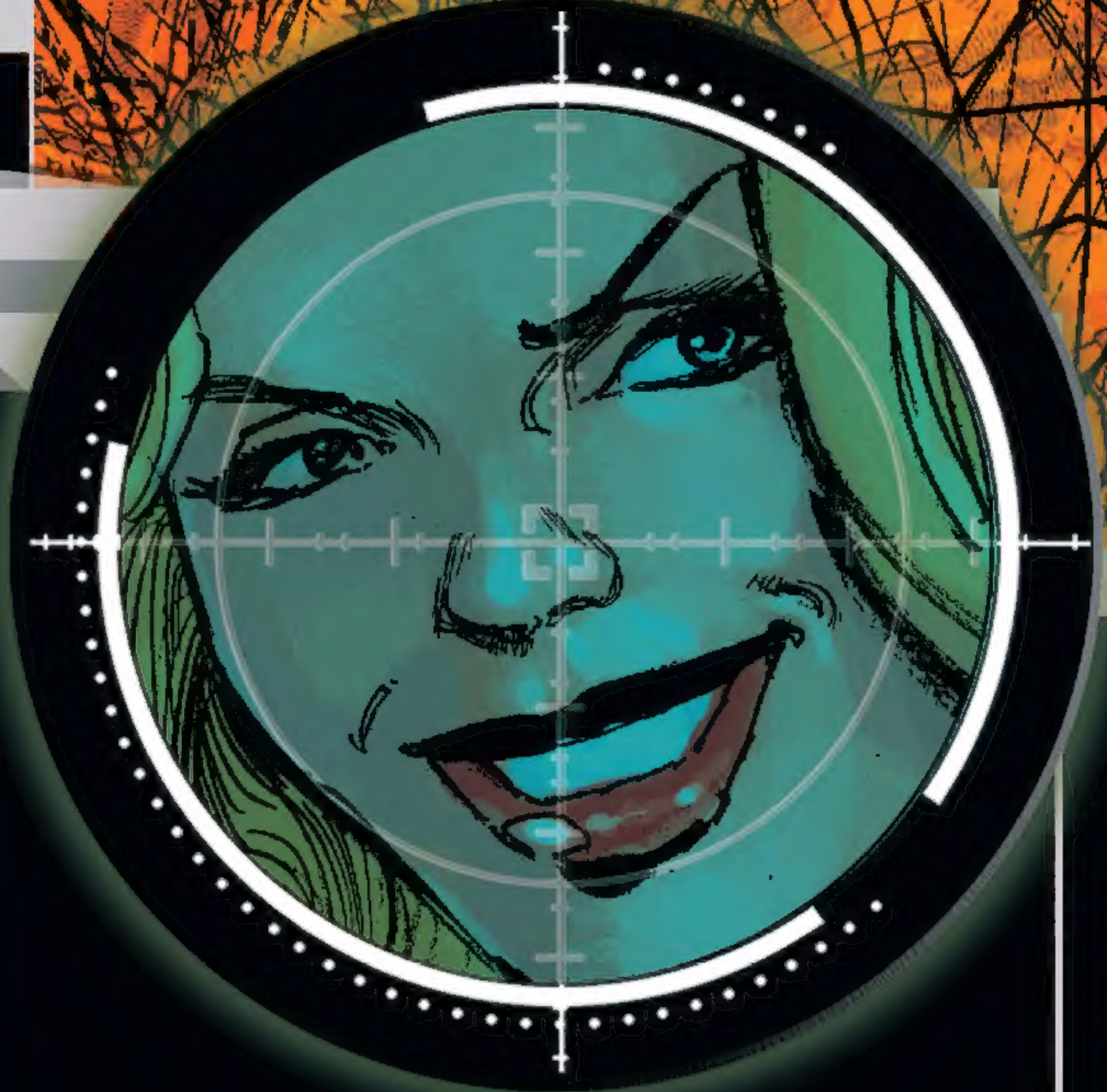
MARITAL STATUS:
Single

FIRST APPEARANCE:
Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #1 (1963)

POWERS/WEAPONS:

- Paratrooper, Ranger, Green Beret, Black Beret, demolitions expert and vehicle specialist
- Expert unarmed and armed combatant
- Black belt in Tae Kwon Do and a brown belt in Jiu Jitsu
- Access to the entire S.H.I.E.L.D. arsenal of conventional and advanced weaponry

.YELENA BELOVA.



REAL NAME:
Captain Yelena Belova

KNOWN ALIASES:
Black Widow, Little Spider, Rooskaya

OCCUPATION:
Espionage agent

CITIZENSHIP:
Russia

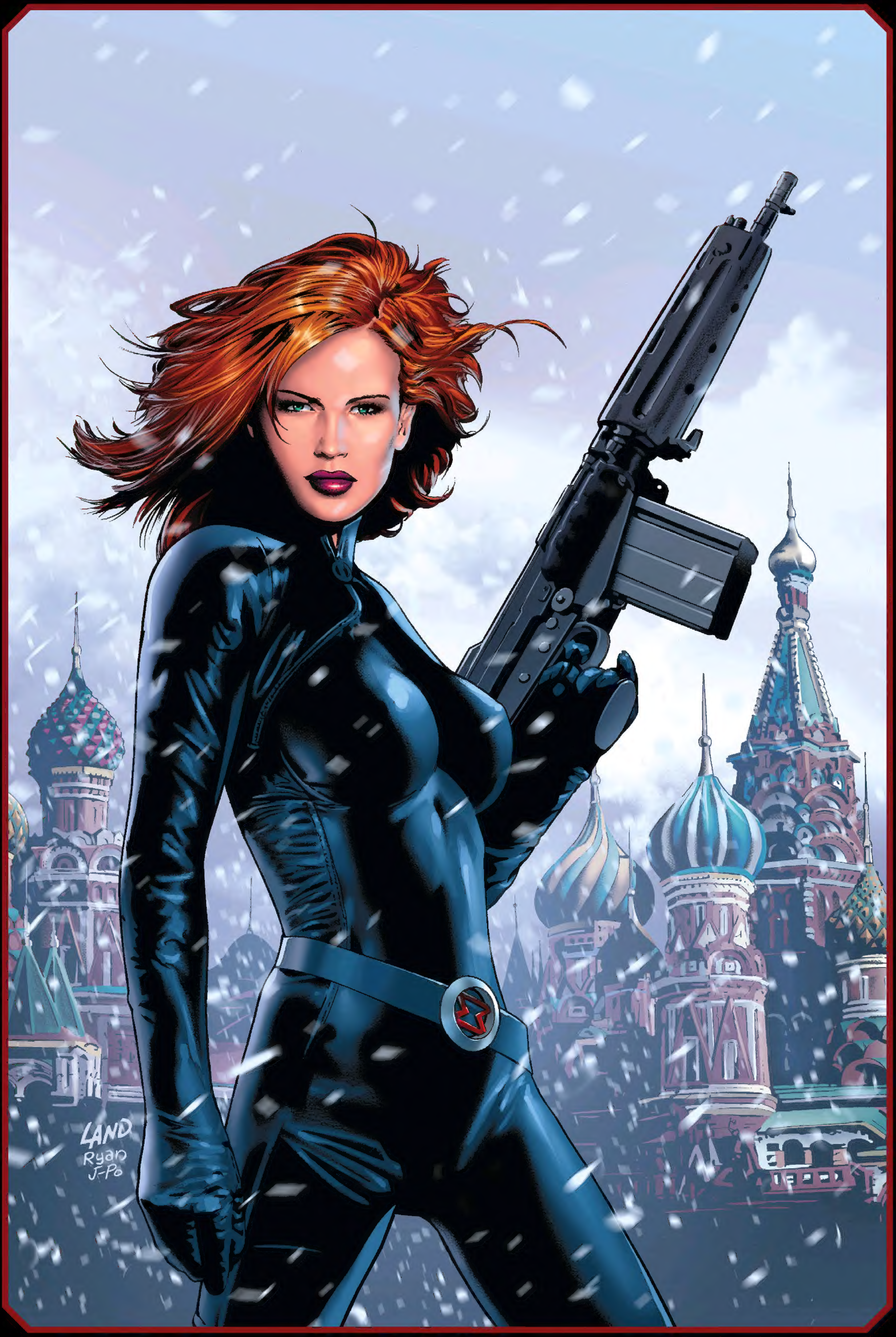
PLACE OF BIRTH:
Russia

MARITAL STATUS:
Single

FIRST APPEARANCE:
Inhumans Vol. 2 #5 (1999)

POWERS/WEAPONS:

- Extensive espionage training
- Master martial artist
- Olympic-level gymnast
- Kevlar costume
- Bracelets that release electric blasts ("Widow's Bite")


LAND
Ryan
J-Po

BLACK WIDOW (2004) #1

"RIGHT TO A LIFE: PART 1"

LONDON
YOU LOOK BEAUTIFUL, ANNA. NOW COME ON, WE'RE GOING TO BE *LATE*.
DO YOU WANT TO DRIVE, DARLING?
IN *THESE* HEELS--ARE YOU KIDDING?
FWOOOM
...UNTIL A WOMAN HAS A *RIGHT* TO CONTROL *HER OWN BODY*, THERE WILL BE NO--
STAND UP FOR
RU 486 NOW
I AM THE FACE
CLINIC
THE MURDER
BABY KILLE MUST BE STO
ALABAMA
BLAM
STACY! I THINK SHE'S--

--DEAD. WELL, I'M *IMPRESSED.*
OSAKA
YEAH. PAINLESS, RAPID, AND IT BREAKS DOWN IN *LESS THAN AN HOUR.*
BY THE TIME THEY FIND HER, IT'LL LOOK LIKE A HEART ATTACK.
SO WHAT *WAS* THAT STUFF, ANYWAY?
OH. *SPIDER VENOM.*
SYDNEY
SHANGHAI
ARIZONA

THAT'S *THREE* BAD NIGHTS IN A ROW. THOUGHT I HAD THE *GUILT* BEATEN LONG AGO.
OUTSIDE OF *CHEMICALS*, THERE'S ONLY ONE CURE I KNOW FOR BAD DREAMS AND BROKEN SLEEP.
LUCKILY, I KEEP IT CLOSE AT HAND.

ROCK CLIMBING...
...IT BEATS SCALING TALL BUILDINGS AND STEALING STATE SECRETS FOR A LIVING. AND BEING RETIRED MEANS I GET TO DO IT...
...WHENEVER THE HELL I WANT!
NOT THE ONLY ONE WITH TROUBLES TODAY, HUH.
SAY, YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ENGINES?
LIVE OUT HERE, YOU *HAVE TO*. LET ME TAKE A LOOK.
SOMETHING CHANGES IN HIS *FACE*--

--AND I KNOW I'M IN *TROUBLE.*
HE'S *YOUNG*-- YOUNGER THAN ME, ANYWAY...
AND HE'S *FAST*...
AND HE HAS A KNIFE HE KNOWS HOW TO USE...
BUT LIKE MOST MEN, IN THE END...
...HE UNDERESTIMATES ME.
WHO SENT YOU?

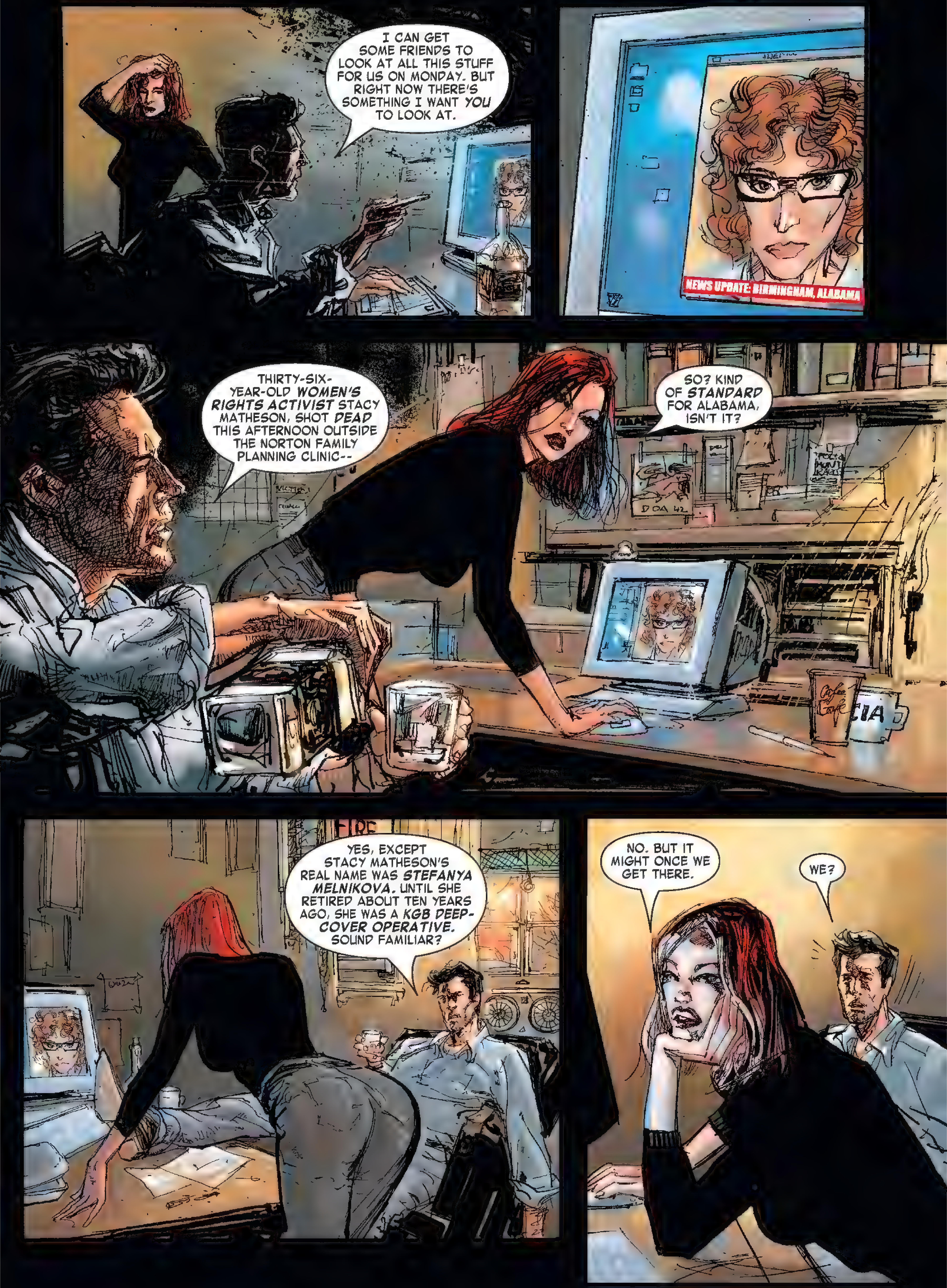
UNLESS I GET YOU TO A HOSPITAL, YOU'RE GOING TO *BLEED TO DEATH* OUT HERE. NOW WHO SENT YOU?
SUIT YOURSELF. SUN'S ON THE RISE. I CAN WAIT.
BUT SO, IT SEEMS, CAN HE...
...HIS BLOOD RUNS OUT INTO THE DESERT...
...AND THE SAND DRINKS IT UP...
...AND HE DOESN'T SAY A *WORD.*
IT TAKES HIM *OVER AN HOUR* TO DIE.
AND HE DOESN'T SAY A DAMNED *WORD.*
OLD SCHOOL. IT SEEMS I'M IN TROUBLE.

MIKE, IT'S NATASHA. I THINK I'M GOING TO BE LATE.
LISTEN, HAS ANYBODY UP AT THE CLUB BEEN ASKING ABOUT ME?
DON'T THINK...HEY, WAIT A MINUTE, YEAH. YESTERDAY. BIG BLOND GUY, ***JOURNALIST,*** SAID HE WAS DOING A FEATURE ON LOCAL CLIMBERS.
DID HE FIND YOU YET?
"YEAH, I THINK HE DID."

THERE ARE *FRIENDS* AND THERE ARE *FRIENDS*. MIKE AND THE REST WOULD DO ANYTHING FOR ME...BUT RIGHT NOW, THERE'S NOTHING THEY *CAN* DO...
...EXCEPT STAY OUT OF THE WAY SO I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THEM GETTING *HURT*.
OTHER FRIENDS I HAVE AREN'T WHAT YOU'D CALL RELIABLE--OR EVEN *LIKEABLE*, REALLY--BUT SOMETIMES THEY CAN BE *USEFUL*...
...AND SOMETIMES...
JENNY
GABRIEL
MATT MURDOCK
YELENA(MOSCOW)
YELENA (LA HAVANA)
...SOMETIMES THEY *OWE* YOU.
GOVERNOR JAMES STANTON
LACEY STANTON (DETOX)
PHIL DEXTER
DEXTER SECURE INQUIRY SERVICES.
HEY, PHIL. YOU'RE ANSWERING YOUR OWN PHONE. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE LATEST *BLONDE?* SILICONE LEAK?
VERY FREAKING FUNNY. WHAT DO YOU WANT, NAT?
HOW ABOUT A DRINK?
THE LAST TIME WE HAD A DRINK, I SPENT THE NEXT MONTH PICKING CHECHEN SHRAPNEL OUT OF MY ASS. I'M NOT COMING TO *DEAD LIZARDSVILLE*, ARIZONA FOR A REPEAT PERFORMANCE.
A-F
G-P
I'M NOT *IN* ARIZONA, PHIL.
Albuquerque
248 Mi.

EASTERN CARIBBEAN
I SUPPOSE YOU'VE SEEN THIS?
....FOUND BESIDE AN ARIZONA HIGHWAY EARLIER TODAY. THE BODY HAD BEEN SAVAGELY MUTILATED IN WHAT POLICE BELIEVE...
SONY
YOU TOLD ME YOUR PEOPLE WERE RELIABLE.
THEY ARE. THIS ONE WILL NOT HAVE TALKED.
OF COURSE HE HASN'T TALKED-- HE WAS DEAD WHEN THEY FOUND HIM. THAT'S HARDLY AN ACHIEVEMENT TO BE PROUD OF.
I MEAN, HE WILL NOT HAVE TALKED TO HER. FOR WHICH YOU SHOULD BE VERY GRATEFUL. WE WOULD NOT WANT HER TO KNOW HOW TO FIND YOU.
OH, PLEASE. NOT ANOTHER HORROR STORY ABOUT THE DREAD BLACK WIDOW. LOOK, YOU RUSSIANS JUST DON'T HAVE THE SCARE-VALUE ANYMORE, ALRIGHT? I'M CALLING IN NORTH.
I WOULD NOT ADVISE INVOLVING YOUR COUNTRYMEN. NORTH ARE--
NORTH ARE ON THEIR HOME GROUND, WHICH GIVES THEM A MAJOR ADVANTAGE OVER YOUR SUPERANNUATED KGB CLOWNS.
FACE IT, THE COLD WAR IS OVER. YOU GUYS LOST. WE OWN YOU NOW.

...THE BODY HAD BEEN SAVAGELY MUTILATED IN WHAT POLICE BELIEVE
"MUTILATED"?
ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO
HE HAD A KNIFE, PHIL. I USED IT ON HIM. GOT A PROBLEM WITH THAT?
YOU KNOW, NAT, LAST TIME YOU DROPPED IN ON ME--
--IT WAS BECAUSE YOU NEEDED MY HELP. WHICH I GAVE. NOW, YOU FEEL LIKE RETURNING THE FAVOR, OR ARE YOU GOING TO DO THE MAN THING AND LET ME DOWN?
OKAY, OKAY. WHAT HAVE YOU GOT?
JESUS! DID YOU HAVE TO TAKE HIS FINGER?
THE RING WOULDN'T COME OFF. PLUS, I FIGURE MAYBE HIS PRINTS ARE ON FILE SOMEWHERE, RIGHT?
YEAH, MAYBE. DON'T COUNT ON IT, THOUGH. IF THIS GUY WAS A SPOOK, WHOEVER HE WAS WORKING FOR WILL HAVE MADE SURE THERE ARE NO RECORDS.
YOU GOT SOME HEAVY GAMBLING DEBTS YOU'RE NOT TELLING ME ABOUT, NAT? BECAUSE IF NOT, THERE'S ONLY ONE EXPLANATION FOR THIS THAT I CAN SEE.
THIS IS YOUR PAST COMING TO CALL.


I CAN GET SOME FRIENDS TO LOOK AT ALL THIS STUFF FOR US ON MONDAY. BUT RIGHT NOW THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT *YOU* TO LOOK AT.
NEWS UPDATE: BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA
THIRTY-SIX-YEAR-OLD ***WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVIST*** STACY MATHESON, SHOT ***DEAD*** THIS AFTERNOON OUTSIDE THE NORTON FAMILY PLANNING CLINIC--
SO? KIND OF ***STANDARD*** FOR ALABAMA, ISN'T IT?
YES, EXCEPT STACY MATHESON'S REAL NAME WAS ***STEFANYA MELNIKOVA.*** UNTIL SHE RETIRED ABOUT TEN YEARS AGO, SHE WAS A ***KGB DEEP-COVER OPERATIVE.*** SOUND FAMILIAR?
NO. BUT IT MIGHT ONCE WE GET THERE.
WE?

DON'T SULK, PHIL. IT RUINS THAT SLIGHTLY SEEDY COOL YOU HAVE.
I'M **NOT** SULKING. I JUST DON'T SEE WHY I HAVE TO COME WITH YOU AND WHY WE HAVE TO GO IN ***MY CAR.***
YEAH, WELL I GUESS THAT'S WHY YOU WERE ALWAYS ***BACKROOM*** AT S.H.I.E.L.D. OPS, AND I WAS ALWAYS ***DEPLOYED.***
WE HAVE TO GO IN YOUR CAR BECAUSE BY NOW THEY'LL BE LOOKING FOR MINE. AND WE HAVE TO GO TOGETHER BECAUSE THE FUNERAL IS ONLY ***THREE DAYS AWAY.*** WE'LL NEED TO DRIVE 'ROUND THE CLOCK TO MAKE IT.
AND I CAN'T DO THAT ALONE.
YOU KNOW, NAT--THAT SOUNDED FOR A MOMENT LIKE AN ADMISSION OF ***NEED.***
AHEM... ANYWAY. WE--***YOU***--COULD HAVE FLOWN RANDOM FLIGHTS ELSEWHERE TO BREAK UP THE TRAIL BEFORE HEADING TO BIRMINGHAM.
YES--***TEXTBOOK STUFF.*** WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT THEY'LL BE LOOKING FOR. THEY'LL HAVE ***EVERY FLIGHT DATABASE IN NORTH AMERICA*** WIRED FOR TRACE...
...TRUST ME, PHIL, ON THE ROAD IS BEST. OUT HERE, WE CAN ***LOSE OURSELVES*** FOR A WHILE.

TEXAS
...LACK OF OPTIONS, PHIL. IT'S WHAT MOST WOMEN ARE UP AGAINST.
"IF YOU WANT TO SUCCEED, YOU'VE GOT TWO CHOICES...
"...POLE DANCER OR HARD-FACED HARRIDAN."
HEY-- IT BEATS MADONNA OR WHORE, RIGHT?
NO, IT IS MADONNA OR WHORE. IT'S JUST THE MADONNA GOT PROMOTED--ON CONDITION SHE'S TWICE AS TOUGH AND TWICE AS SMART AS ANY MAN SHE'S DEALING WITH.
"ANYTHING LESS AND THEY'LL RIP HER TO SHREDS."
THAT YOU, IS IT, NAT? TWICE AS TOUGH AND TWICE AS SMART?
LET'S HOPE SO.
HEY, SUGAR...
...YOU LOOKIN' FOR A RIDE?

Roy's HOUSE OF ASPS 2Mi
TRUCK
24-7
COFFEE?
I'LL GET IT TO GO. YOU FILL UP.
HEY, WE'RE NOT STOPPING FOR THE SNAKE FARM?
VERY FUNNY. CHECK THE OIL, WILL YOU? THIS HEAP OF YOURS WAS OVERHEATING BACK THERE FOR A WHILE.
YEAH, MAYBE BECAUSE THIS HEAP DOESN'T USUALLY RUN TWELVE HOURS NON-STOP CROSS-COUNTRY. SHE'S GETTING TOO OLD TO TREAT THAT ROUGH.
AND SHE'S NOT THE ONLY ONE.
UH-UH, SUGAR. WHERE YOU GOIN'?
YOU AIN'T PAID FOR THE RIDE YET.
I DON'T WANT A RIDE ANYMORE.
WELL, MAYBE YOU DON'T, SALLY ANNE, BUT YOU JUST RODE TWO HUNDRED MILES WITH ME AND JAY. I FIGURE THE LEAST YOU CAN DO IS SHOW US SOME APPRECIATION.

AIN'T GOIN' TO BE THE FIRST TIME FOR YOU NEITHER, AM I RIGHT OR AM I RIGHT?
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO DO ANYTHING, RIGHT?
ARE YOU *KIDDING?* YOU WANT TO BE ALL OVER THE MORNING NEWS? THIS IS HARDLY THE TIME FOR PLAYING *SUPER HERO.*
SO YOU'RE JUST GOING TO *WATCH?*
I'VE WATCHED WORSE. I WAS SECONDED TO *CIA COVERT OPS* IN GUATEMALA FOR FIVE YEARS. AND NICK FURY HAD ME WORKING WITH THE *AFGHAN WARLORDS.* THIS LITTLE TRAGEDY I CAN LIVE WITH.
YEAH, WELL I *CAN'T.*
NATASHA...
THAT'S *ENOUGH.* LET HER GO.
THIS AIN'T YOUR BUSINESS, SUGAR. SO *BACK OFF.*

I PROMISE YOU THIS: IF YOU DON'T LET HER GO RIGHT NOW, NEITHER OF YOU WILL EVER WALK AGAIN.
I TOLD YOU TO BACK OFF, COW--
--NOW TAKE YOUR COFFEE AND GO--
BLAM!
HA!

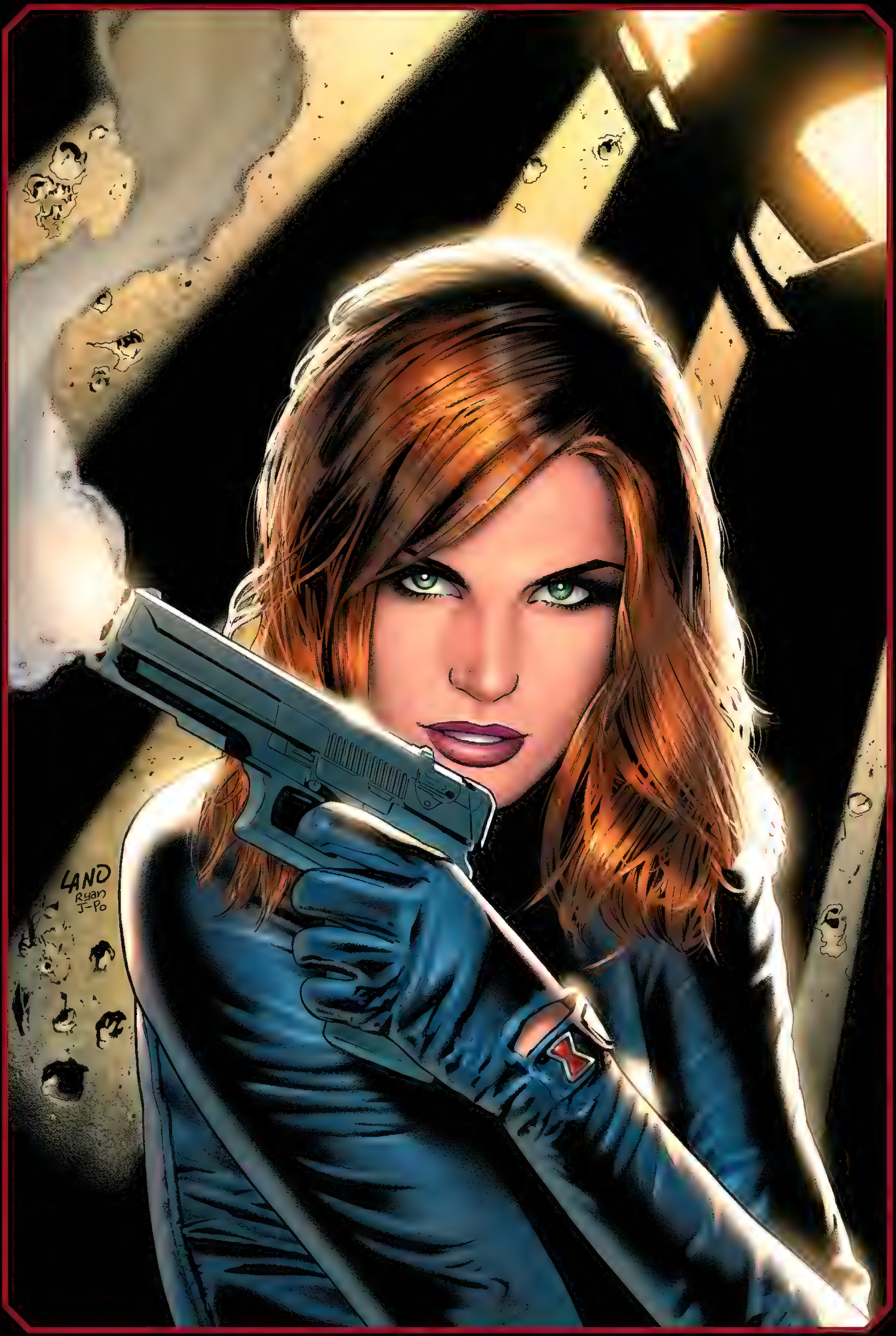
GREAT. JUST WHAT WE NEED.
WANT TO GO IN AND GET *AUTOGRAPHS?*
YOU OKAY?
I... I THINK SO.
MY SIDE HURTS. THAT ONE, HE PUNCHED ME IN THE RIBS A FEW MILES BACK WHEN I WOULDN'T, WOULDN'T--
PHIL--
--CAN'T BELIEVE YOU--
PHIL!!! GET THE CAR, NOW!!
DRAGONS
RIGHT SIDE
SUICIDE
KISS MY
NOW WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU--
JUST A MINUTE.
NAT, YOU CANNOT BE *SERIOUS* ABOUT--
KKRAK!
I KEEP MY *PROMISES,* PHIL.

OKLAHOMA
COULD YOU PLEASE NOT DO THAT SORT OF THING ANYMORE?
WHAT SORT OF THING?
YOU *KNOW* WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.
OH, *THAT.* BUT I THOUGHT YOU'D WATCHED FAR WORSE IN GUATEMALA AND AFGHANISTAN BACK IN THE DAY.
YEAH, THAT DOESN'T MEAN I WANT TO HAVE TO *WATCH* YOU--
YOU SEEMED QUITE HAPPY TO WATCH WHAT WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN TO THAT GIRL.
NAT, YOU AND I BOTH KNOW THAT WHAT HAPPENS IN THE FIELD IS *DIFFERENT--*
AND HOW'S THAT?
THE *DIFFERENCE,* NAT, IS THAT NOW I'M *AN ACCESSORY TO MURDER AND ASSAULT.*
THE *DIFFERENCE* IS THAT THERE'LL BE COPS SCOURING THE STATE FOR MY CAR, WHICH RIGHT NOW I CAN'T AFFORD TO REPLACE. THE DIFFERENCE IS--
--THEY'LL NEVER FIND IT, PHIL.
YEAH, AND THE *GIRL?* LITTLE MISS *HITCHER?* HOW LONG BEFORE SHE GETS BORED WITH SITTING IN THAT SAFE HOUSE ALONE AND HITS THE LOCAL BARS WITH TALES OF HER *FLAME-HAIRED AVENGING ANGEL?*

THE KID HITCHES ACROSS STATE WITH NOTHING BUT THE CLOTHES ON HER BACK AND A SWEET LITTLE SMILE. IF SHE'S GOING TO BE STUPID ENOUGH TO GET INTO A TRUCK WITH TWO STRANGE MEN...
MAYBE SHE SHOULD HAVE JUST STAYED WITH HER OVERFRIENDLY STEPFATHER, HUH?
AH, COME ON. THAT COULD BE A COMPLETE CROCK, AND YOU KNOW IT.
WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU, PHIL? I MEAN, YOU WERE ALWAYS KIND OF SLEAZY, THAT WAS PART OF YOUR CHARM. BUT YOU USED TO CARE ABOUT THE BASICS. WHAT DID FURY DO TO YOU?
MIKHAIL BULGAKOV
BEFORE OR AFTER HE FIRED ME?
DRINKING ON THE JOB AND DISOBEYING ORDERS. CAN YOU BLAME HIM?
I BLAME EVERYONE. THAT'S A LOSER'S PREROGATIVE. AND UNTIL YOU KNOW WHAT ORDERS I DISOBEYED, I SUGGEST YOU KEEP YOUR MORAL JUDGMENTS TO YOURSELF.
FINE--
--YOU CAN DO THE SAME FOR ME. I'LL CRIPPLE WHO I LIKE.
LOOK, I'M NOT NEARLY DRUNK ENOUGH TO TELL YOU WHAT FURY'S ORDERS WERE. LET'S STICK TO THE SUBJECT. WHAT ABOUT THE GIRL?
OKAY, THE GIRL. AFTER ALABAMA, WE'LL GO PICK HER UP AND-AND--
--AND I'LL THINK OF SOMETHING, OKAY?
YEAH, RIGHT.
LISTEN, WHEN YOU OPERATE IN THE FIELD THIS IS HOW IT WORKS, PHIL. SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO IMPROVISE.
GREAT. I AM REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO ALABAMA.

NORTH OF ALBUQUERQUE
NO OTHER TIRE TRACKS--SHE WALKED OUT, AT LEAST TO THE ROAD BACK THERE.
YEAH, AND PROBABLY TO *ANOTHER WAITING VEHICLE.* I DON'T THINK SHE'D MAROON HERSELF OUT HERE ALONE AND WITHOUT TRANSPORT, DO YOU?
HARD TO SAY. FILE SAYS SHE'S HAD *DESERT SURVIVAL TRAINING.* IN FACT, THEY SAY WITH THIS ONE, THERE'S NO WAY TO PREDICT *ANYTHING* SHE'LL DO.
YEAH, *"THEY SAY".* WELL, MY HUNCH HERE SAYS SHE HAD *COMPANY.*
OKAY, GO AHEAD--*OPEN IT.*

LIKE I SAID, MAX--WITH THIS ONE, THERE'S NO WAY TO PREDICT.
YEAH, WELL *ONE THING* I WILL PREDICT FOR YOU, KESTREL: SURE AS *APPLES ROT*, THE WIDOW IS HEADED FOR *A HOLE IN THE GROUND*.


LAND
Ryan
J-Po

BLACK WIDOW (2004) #2

"RIGHT TO A LIFE: PART 2"

FOR UNTO ALL OF US COMES THIS DAY...
ALABAMA
...HAS TAKEN OUR SISTER STACY UNTO HIS CARE...
HEY, NAT, SPOT THE GUY WHO CAME TO THE WRONG FUNERAL.
OR *NOT.* WHEN THIS BREAKS UP, YOU FOLLOW HIM. TAKE THE RENTAL CAR. I'LL SEE YOU BACK AT THE HOTEL.
EXCUSE ME...

OH. AHEM
UH, ARE YOU FROM--
NADINE ROMAN. I KNEW STACY FROM HER *SLAVONIC STUDIES CLASS.*
OH, YES. ACTUALLY, I DON'T REMEMBER HER TELLING ME ABOUT THAT, BUT WE WERE, YOU KNOW, JUST GOOD FRIENDS, NOTHING MORE THAN THAT, UH...
ARE YOU COMING BACK FOR THE--
I WAS, BUT MY RIDE JUST LEFT...
BECAUSE I COULD, YOU KNOW, GIVE YOU A LIFT, IF--
THAT'S VERY KIND, AH...
BRAD. BRAD SCHOFIELD.
NADINE.
NADINE. RIGHT. TH-THAT'S A *LOVELY NAME...*

AFTER THAT IT WAS PRETTY **EASY.** AND YOU WANT TO HEAR A BIG SECRET? IT SEEMS OUR STACY WAS **NEARLY THREE MONTHS PREGNANT** WHEN SHE GOT SHOT.
IRONIC, HUH? IF THE PRO-LIFERS GOT HER, I MEAN?
AND IF IT WAS SOMEONE ELSE?
THEN JUST **UNLUCKY.** I GOT HER ADDRESS FROM THIS GUY BRAD. WE SHOULD GO OUT THERE TONIGHT AND TAKE A LOOK.
SURE, IF YOU AND **YOUNG BRAD** DON'T HAVE OTHER PLANS.
HA. SO TELL ME ABOUT OUR **SOLDIER BOY.**
AND STOP LOOKING AT **MY ASS.**
WHAT? I WASN'T--
AH, HELL, YEAH, ALRIGHT, I WAS. SORRY.
LOOK, THIS GUY HAD A COUPLE OF PALS IN A JEEP BACK AT THE GATE. THERE'S A MILITARY BASE OUT ON THE WEST SIDE OF TOWN--**INNKERCHEE.** THAT'S WHERE THEY WENT.
I GOT PHOTOS, SCANNED THEM INTO THE LAPTOP AND RAN THEM BY A FRIEND IN WASHINGTON. THIS IS WHAT I GOT BACK.
VERY PRETTY. AND THAT'S **INS.E.R.T. INSIGNIA,** ISN'T IT?

YEAH. SERGEANT WILL FORESTER, SECONDED TO INS.E.R.T. CORPS FROM REGULAR FORCES TWO YEARS AGO. STILL WITH THEM AS FAR AS I CAN WORK OUT.
INS.E.R.T. INSURGENCY, EXTRACTION, RECONNAISSANCE--
--AND TERMINATION. YEAH.
MAKES YOU WONDER, RIGHT? ABOUT WHO PUT THAT BULLET IN STACY?
IS INNKERCHEE AN INS.E.R.T. FACILITY?
NOT AS FAR AS I'M AWARE. BUT THOSE GUYS ARE GHOSTS. WHO KNOWS?
WELL, HE SEEMED PRETTY UPSET AT THE FUNERAL.
SO HE'S THE SENSITIVE TYPE. YOU KNOW, WEEPS EVERY TIME HE HAS TO KILL SOME EX-SOVIET SPY. MAYBE IT'S NOT A GOOD IDEA FOR YOU TO STICK AROUND.
OR MAYBE SOME PRO-LIFE NUT GOT HER AFTER ALL. EITHER WAY, I'M NOT LEAVING UNTIL I HAVE SOME ANSWERS.
WE'RE GOING TO STACY'S PLACE. NOW.

ROT IN HELL BABY KILLER!
YOU THINK YOU COULD HAVE CHANGED FOR THIS?
HEY, NAT, FUNERALS, BURGLARY--IT'S AN ALL-PURPOSE BLACK.
ANYWAY, SPEAKING OF DRESS, WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THOSE STINGER BRACELETS YOU WERE SO FAMOUS FOR?
PHIL, YOU EVER TRY CARRYING FOUR KILOS OF HI-TECH HARDWARE WRAPPED AROUND EACH WRIST?
DIDN'T THINK SO.
CLICK

"HEAVY, AWKWARD, ALWAYS GETTING IN THE WAY. IN MOSCOW ONCE, I DAMN NEAR SHOT MY OWN HAND OFF.
"PLUS THEY WERE WARSAW PACT ISSUE AND YOU NEVER COULD GET THE REPLACEMENT PARTS IN THE U.S.
"AND THEY WERE ALWAYS BREAKING DOWN. SO ONE DAY--
"--I TOOK THEM OFF--"
--AND JUST NEVER PUT THEM BACK ON AGAIN.
CLICK
YOU COMING IN?

NAT, WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR, EXACTLY?
NO *IDEA.*
BUT LET ME KNOW IF YOU SEE IT.
HELPFUL, THANKS.
HI, YOU'VE REACHED STACY MATHESON. PLEASE LEAVE A MESSAGE, UNLESS OF COURSE YOU'RE CALLING TO **DAMN ME TO HELL** *FOR* **ALL ETERNITY**, *IN WHICH CASE, YOU CAN JUST* **DROP DEAD**...*BEEP*
POLICE MUST HAVE TAKEN THE MESSAGE TAPE FOR EVIDENCE.
OR SOMEONE ELSE DID.
PARANOID.
YEAH, I KEEP THINKING SOMEONE'S TRYING TO KILL ME.
CREAAK
HOLD UP.
THIS IS HOLLOW.
CLAC
CLAC
CLOK

TWENTY
20
Стефаночка
UNCLE ILYA.
SAY WHAT?
Стефаночка дорогая,
Я сожалею но я должна тебе
сказать что твоя тётя заболела.
Она настаивает на том, чтобы
немедленно увидеть тебя и всем
уже сказала что если ты ни придешь
домой как следует, наследство
ацк нщгю екн ещ куьуьиу
ерyыу ешьуыю фы
цуку ерy щтуы
ацк нщг
ерфе
рцьу
фищге ершы
ершпл дщтп фть рфь
иусфгыу щтсу нщг икуфл сщтефсе
нщг щидд тумук иу фиду ещ сщьу
рщьу
"MY DEAREST STACY,
IT IS WITH GREAT REGRET THAT I MUST TELL YOU YOUR AUNT IS NOT WELL. SHE INSISTS ON SEEING YOU AT ONCE, AND HAS TOLD EVERYBODY IN THE FAMILY THAT IF YOU DO NOT COME HOME AS A LOVING NIECE SHOULD, THE INHERITANCE WILL NOT--"

AND UNCLE ILYA IS...?
IT'S A CODE NAME FOR HER KGB CONTROLLER. HE'S TELLING HER THAT SHE HAS TO ***MAKE A CHOICE:***
COME HOME TO MOSCOW FOR ***FINAL DEBRIEFING,*** OR BE CUT LOOSE FROM KGB PROTECTION FOREVER AND TAKE HER CHANCES HERE IN THE WEST.
THIS MUST BE FROM SOME TIME IN 1990, '91, AFTER THE BERLIN WALL CAME DOWN. THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN TRYING TO PULL ALL THE DEEP COVER AGENTS OUT QUICKLY BEFORE ***GORBACHEV*** ORDERED THE WHOLE OPERATION SHUT DOWN.
SHE MUST HAVE DECIDED--
--TO STAY, YEAH, YEAH. HAVE A SHOT AT ***REAL LIFE*** IN THE ***LAND OF THE FREE,*** I CAN SEE THAT. BUT WHY WOULD SHE KEEP SOMETHING LIKE THIS FOR ALL THESE YEARS?
SOMETIMES YOU NEED SOMETHING TO REMIND YOU OF WHO YOU ONCE WERE, SOMETHING TO STOP THE PAST FROM BECOMING ***A DREAM.*** I...I HAD A LETTER LIKE THIS ONCE...
RIGHT, LOOK, I'LL JUST GIVE YOU A MOMENT ON MEMORY LANE, OKAY?
ELEVEN, TWELVE, THIRTEEN-- MAN, THIS JUSTS GETS BETTER AND BETTER....
SO HOW MUCH WAS THERE?
AGH!!!
HOW MUCH HAVE YOU ***STOLEN*** FROM STEFANYA MELNIKOVA?

WHAT? I'M NOT--
LOOK, IT'S NOT LIKE SHE'S GOING TO *NEED IT* WHERE SHE--
OKAY. ABOUT *SEVENTEEN GRAND.*
IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED, WE'VE INCURRED A FEW MINOR EXPENSES RECENTLY AND--
HEY! STOP LOOKING AT *MY* ASS, WILLYA?
DON'T FLATTER YOURSELF, PHIL.
LOOK AT THIS.
MEDUSAGEN...? SOUNDS LIKE A *HORMONE.*
YEAH, A *REALLY NASTY* ONE. YOU SEEN IT BEFORE?
NO. BUT THESE I *DO* RECOGNIZE. YOU?
PHENO--I CAN'T EVEN *PRONOUNCE* THAT. PAINKILLERS?

MILITARY-ISSUE PAINKILLERS. VERY POWERFUL, VERY DIFFICULT TO GET HOLD OF OUTSIDE OF MILITARY CIRCLES.
UNLESS YOU'VE GOT SOMEONE INSIDE WITH A VESTED INTEREST IN YOUR WELL-BEING.
OR MAYBE A PATERNAL INTEREST. SHE WAS PREGNANT, REMEMBER.
INNKERCHEE DUTY OFFICER.
YES, I'D LIKE TO SPEAK TO SERGEANT WILLIAM FORESTER IMMEDIATELY.
I DON'T BELIEVE THAT WILL BE POSSIBLE AT THIS HOUR--
SON, THIS IS COLONEL ULYSSES CATHCART OF INS.E.R.T. COMMAND, WASHINGTON, COMMAND CLEARANCE AZURE. NOW, WHAT I DON'T BELIEVE IS THAT YOU THINK SERGEANT FORESTER'S SLEEP PATTERNS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN NATIONAL SECURITY...
...OR DO YOU, SON?
UH, NO SIR!!!
GOOD, THEN WE UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER. NOW YOU BUZZ SERGEANT FORESTER RIGHT AWAY.

YOU KNOW, I REALLY HOPE OLD CATHCART IS STILL RUNNING OFF **CLEARANCE AZURE.** HOPE HE'S STILL AT **INS.E.R.T.,** TOO, BECAUSE IF NOT--
THIS IS FORESTER.
Отец моего ребёнка, что ты сделал?
Кто... кто это?
Ты знаешь кто. Я жду тебя в постели где была зачата наша дочь. Иди ко мне неделенно!
AND THAT WAS?
BAIT. COME ON, WE NEED TO FIND YOU A HIDING PLACE.
YOU THINK HE'S GOING TO COME HERE? RIGHT NOW?
HE'S ***CONFUSED*** AND ***UPSET.*** HE'S JUST HEARD A WOMAN'S VOICE IN ***RUSSIAN*** CALLING OUT FOR HIM...
...AND I DIDN'T THINK THAT WAS ***SUCH*** A BAD ***STACY IMPRESSION,*** DID YOU?
ALLOW ME TO APPLAUD YOUR MULTIPLE TALENTS FOR ***MANIPULATION*** AND ***DECEIT.***
I'M A SPY. ***WAS*** A SPY.
YOU USE WHATEVER KEEPS YOU AHEAD OF THE OPPOSITION.

WELL, SOMEONE AROUND HERE IS HELPING HER, SHERIFF. SOMEONE WITH A HISTORY, SO I SUGGEST YOU KEEP LOOKING UNTIL YOU DIG THAT HISTORY UP!
Santa Fe Dominion Hotel
NEW MEXICO
SOMETHING'S WRONG HERE, KESTREL. IT'S ALL TOO CLEAN. NO TRACES, NOTHING TO GET A GRIP ON.
YOU THINK SHE WENT TO ANOTHER SLEEPER FOR HELP? ANOTHER DEEP COVER?
YEAH. OR WITH THE BODY SHE'S GOT, MAYBE SOME GUY SHE'S GOT HOOKS IN FROM THE OLD S.H.I.E.L.D. DAYS. THEY'RE USUALLY BURIED PRETTY DEEP, TOO.
IF THAT'S THE CASE, FURY WOULD KNOW.
YEAH, BUT THERE'S NO REASON ON EARTH HE'D FEEL THE NEED TO SHARE IT WITH US. HE'S BARELY COOPERATING AS IT IS.
MAYBE I'LL JUST GO UP TO WASHINGTON AND KICK IT OUT OF HIM.

OR MAYBE YOU *WON'T*. JUST RELAX, MAX. THIS *INTER-AGENCY STUFF* IS *ALWAYS* A PAIN IN THE ASS.
JUST TOO MUCH TESTOSTERONE ALL AROUND.
KOBAYASHI
YEAH, WELL YOU *WOULD* SAY THAT.
DOESN'T SEEM TO *STOP* YOU WORKING FOR *NORTH* THOUGH.
HEY, *NORTH* PAYS *TWICE MY C.I.A. DAY RATE*. I'D BE A FOOL TO--
QUEEEP
YES, THIS IS MAX HUNTER. TELL ME SOMETHING I WANT TO HEAR, WHY DON'T YOU?
UNDERSTOOD, CAPTAIN. YES, I DO THINK IT'S OF NOTE. TAKE YOUR TEAM AND GET AFTER THE FATHER *IMMEDIATELY*.
AND IF HE LOOKS LIKE HE'S TALKING TO THE *WRONG PEOPLE*, YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO.
THE WIDOW'S NOT HERE. WE'RE IN THE *WRONG STATE*, KESTREL.
NOT FROM WHERE I'M STANDING.

ALABAMA
STACY...?
...IS THAT Y-- *AAAAGH!!*
NOT QUITE. BUT I KNOW WHO *YOU* ARE, WILL FORESTER.
GET BACK, GET BACK OR I'LL--
SPARE US THE *DRAMATICS,* WILL. HAVE A SEAT.

WHO *ARE* YOU PEOPLE?
I'M A FRIEND OF STACY'S. LOOKING OUT FOR HER INTERESTS, YOU COULD SAY.
STACY'S DEAD.
YEAH, WE SAW HER GO INTO THE HOLE, PAL. TELL US SOMETHING WE *DON'T KNOW.* LIKE DID YOU GIVE HER *THESE PILLS?*
I'M NOT TELLING YOU A DAMN THING.
WILL, WE ALL KNOW THE PRO-LIFERS DIDN'T REALLY SHOOT STACY. IT WAS A PROFESSIONAL JOB. VERY COMPETENT.
AND WHOEVER DID IT IS GOING TO COME LOOKING FOR THE *FATHER* OF STACY'S *UNBORN CHILD.*
IT WAS *YOU* ON THE PHONE? SPEAKING *RUSSIAN?*
THAT'S RIGHT. LIKE I SAID, I'M A FRIEND--FROM *THE OLD DAYS.* STACY'S TOLD YOU ABOUT THAT, RIGHT?
I KNOW WHAT SHE USED TO BE. SHE TOLD ME, BUT I DIDN'T *CARE.* I WAS *CRAZY* ABOUT HER. I WOULD HAVE *QUIT THE MILITARY* SOONER THAN LOSE HER.

DID YOU GET HER THE MEDUSAGEN?
NO, I SWEAR. I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT THAT IS.
I GOT HER SOME PAINKILLERS. SHE WAS HAVING PROBLEMS WITH THE PREGNANCY, IT WASN'T NORMAL. BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN THOSE BEF--
KRESH-SHSH!
BLA-BLA-BLA-BLA-BLAP
GET DOWN!
SO DO YOU WANT TO DO THE SUPER-HERO THING? STAY AND FIGHT THE BAD GUYS?
NO, WE'RE GOING TO RUN AWAY. OUT THE BACK, FAST. AND GIVE ME FORESTER'S GUN.

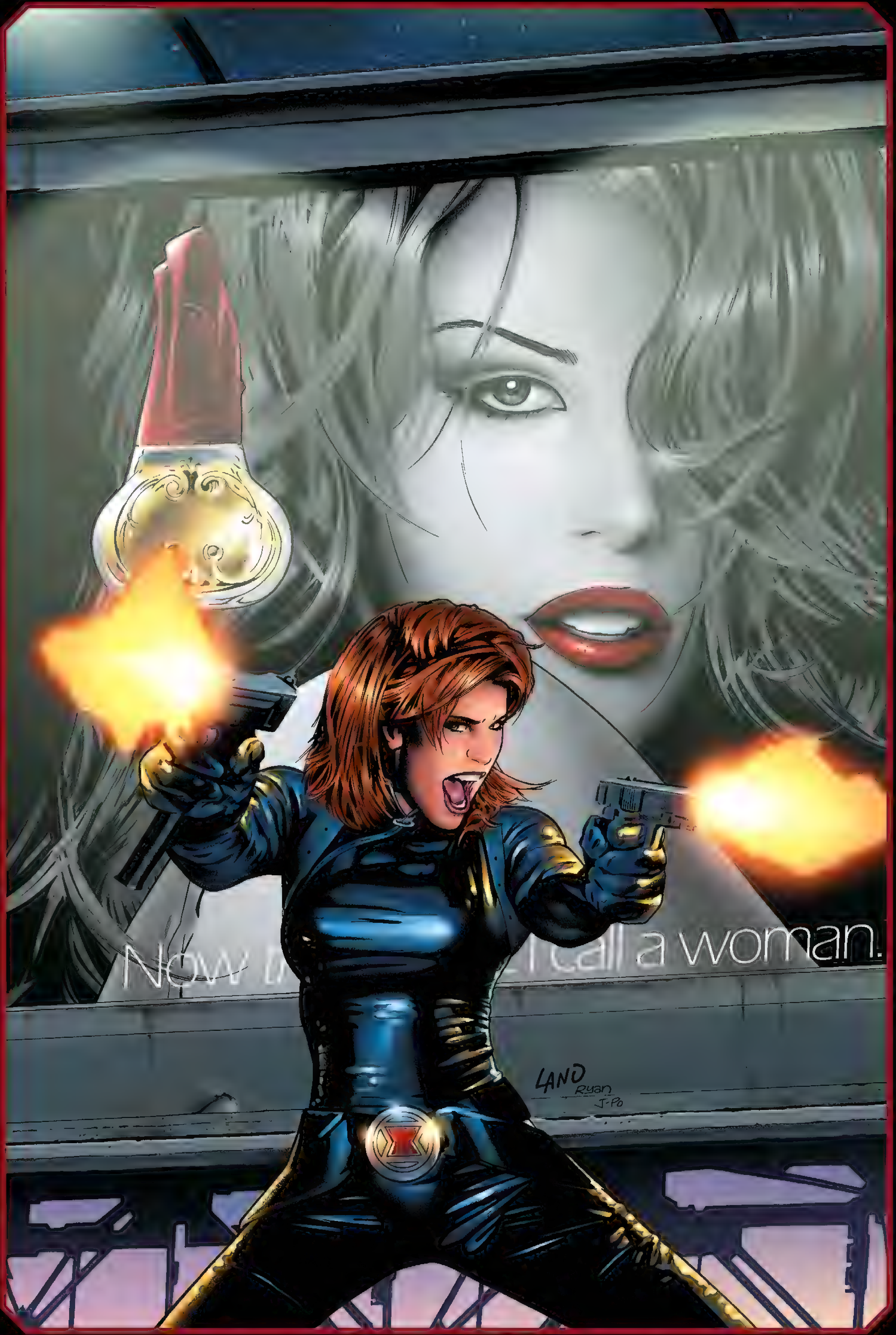
KRACK!!!
BLA-BLA-BLA-BLA-BLAP!!!
BLA-BLA-BLAP!
BLA-BLA-BLAP! BLAP!
NOT GOOD, NAT. THEY'RE OUT BACK, TOO.

THEN LET ME GO *FIRST.*
B'LA-BLA-BLA-B'LA-BLA-BLA-BLABLABLAP
THAT'S IT, BOYS. *SHOW* ME WHERE YOU *ARE.*

BLAM! BLAM!
BLAM! BLAM!
AAAGH!!
LET'S GO, PHIL!!
FLUP!
FLUP!
FLUP!
YAAAAA!
BLA-BLA
BLAP!
BLA-BLA
W.A.T.

GENERALLY, I DON'T LIKE GUNS. TOO MUCH *NOISE*...
AIEEEGH!!
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAP
BLAP
CLIK
CLIK
CLIK
YOU HAVE TO *RELOAD*...
KBAK!
BLABLA-BLAP
AND THEY'RE *MORE* THAN A LITTLE *SYMBOLICALLY SUSPECT*...

BUT SOMETIMES--
--YOU REALLY DON'T HAVE A *CHOICE.*
THINK... WE'D BETTER GET...OUT OF HERE. YOU OKAY?
NAT?
NAT!!


Now
call a woman.
LAND
Ryan
J-Po

BLACK WIDOW (2004) #3
"NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL A WOMAN"

Dessain Red...
Men will want you...
DR
SO WHERE THE *HELL* IS SHE NOW?
SOUTHERN CARIBBEAN
Men will seek you out...
ANYTHING AT ALL, THE *SLIGHTEST TRACE,* I WANT TO KNOW ABOUT IT.
ALABAMA
Men will remember your face...
I UNDERSTAND PERFECTLY, SIR. WE'RE DOING EVERYTHING WE CAN.
NATALYA ROMANOVA
WASHINGTON, D.C.
Dessain Red, by Gynacon. Buy it, wear it, keep it with you.
DR
NNNNNAAAAAGH!!

YOU SURE THIS IS ALL THE DISINFECTANT WE'VE GOT?
IT'S SIX-FIFTEEN IN THE MORNING, NAT.
WHERE AM I GOING TO BUY MEDICAL SUPPLIES AROUND HERE?
NEVER MIND, IT'S ONLY A *FLESH WOUND*. I'M *DONE*. LET'S GET *BACK* ON THE *ROAD*.
FRANKLY, CAPTAIN, THIS IS *UNBELIEVABLE*. *NINE MEN?* NINE OF YOUR *HAND-PICKED TEAM* DEAD.
A.T.
WE'RE TALKING ABOUT A WOMAN HERE. *ONE WOMAN*.
SHE WASN'T ACTING *ALONE*, SIR.
OH, GREAT. SO EXACTLY HOW MANY OF THESE PSYCHOS *ARE* THERE, THEN?

SOMEWHERE SOUTHEAST OF THE URALS
SO...
...JOURNEY'S END.
THTKAKAKKKK

STUPID LITTLE TROLLOP--YOU GOT TO WONDER WHY ON EARTH SHE'D COME *BACK HERE,* RIGHT?
WHY WOULD *ANY* OF THEM COME BACK? TRAINING? MEMORY? *HOMESICKNESS,* MAYBE?
COME ON, IT'S GETTING *COLD.* WE CAN LEAVE HER TO THE *DOGS.*
BOUND TO BE A COUPLE OF PACKS SKULKING AROUND HERE *SOMEWHERE.*
YEAH, MAYBE IT'S LIKE *HOMING PIGEONS.*
WHAT, THE DOGS?
NO, MORON! *HER.* THE *OTHER TWO.* MAYBE VASSILY'S GOT IT ALL WRONG, CHASING ALL OVER HAVING *THEM* KILLED. MAYBE WE SHOULD JUST WAIT FOR THEM TO COME TO *US.*
YEAH, WELL, WHEN VASSILY GETS BACK FROM AMERICA, YOU WANT TO TELL HIM HE'S ALL WRONG, BE MY GUEST.
NO...NO...IT'S JUST...THIS IS A *RUSSIAN* PROJECT, *RIGHT?* SO I DON'T SEE WHY WE CAN'T KEEP IT IN RUSSIA.
RUSSIA!? YOU'RE *KIDDING* ME!

SSH! KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN. YOU'RE GOING TO WAKE SALLY ANNE. AND I DIDN'T SAY *RUSSIA*, I SAID THE *SOVIET UNION*. THIS IS *ANCIENT HISTORY*, NAT.
OKLAHOMA
THE DRUGS STACY WAS TAKING, THE MEDUSAGEN, I'VE GOT NOTHING BACK ON THAT YET. BUT THE RING YOU *CUT OFF* THE GUY WHO TRIED TO KILL YOU IN ARIZONA... I HAD A FRIEND CHECK IT OUT. THEY HADN'T SEEN IT IN A WHILE BUT THEY SURE KNEW WHAT IT WAS.
Gynacon
Gynac
THIS IS *SOVIET BLACK OPS* JEWELRY. ONLY GUYS EVER GOT TO WEAR IT WERE *ASSASSINS* WORKING OUT OF *THE RED ROOM*.
YOU'LL REMEMBER *THOSE* GUYS, RIGHT?
THIS IS *RIDICULOUS*. THE RED ROOM NO LONGER *EXISTS*.
YEAH, RIGHT--AS FAR AS THAT GOES. BUT IN THE INTELLIGENCE COMMMUNITY, *NOTHING* EVER REALLY DIES. AND NAT...
...NOBODY WHO'S STILL BREATHING EVER *REALLY* GETS TO RETIRE.

BACK TO WORK, THEN. I HAVE CLIMBED MORE INTERESTING PITCHES THAN THIS RECENTLY--
--BUT NOT ALONE AND NOT WITHOUT ROPES. AND NOT IN THE DARK. AND THE RAIN.
AND CERTAINLY NOT WHERE I HAD TO BE QUIET WHEN I REACHED THE TOP.
AND IN CASE YOU'RE WONDERING: DON'T I MISS ALL THIS? THE ANSWER IS NO--
KLINK
ATLANTA

KLIK!
--NOT ANY OF IT.
MHMMMPHPHUPH!
BE QUIET. I'M NOT HERE TO HURT YOU *OR* YOUR HUSBAND, BUT IF YOU SCREAM, I *WILL* KILL YOU. DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?

SO WHO'S THIS GUY SHE'S GOING TO SEE?
JIM KOENIG. MIDDLE MANAGEMENT SPOOK. DEBRIEFED ME A COUPLE OF YEARS BACK ABOUT SOME OLD FRIENDS OF NAT'S. HE'S A SUIT. NO ONE SPECIAL.
"NO ONE SPECIAL". SURE. THAT'S WHY SHE HAS TO GET IN THROUGH A LOCKED TWENTY-STORY WINDOW INSTEAD OF JUST KNOCKING ON THE FRONT DOOR.
WELL, SEE, NAT AND I ARE BOTH RETIRED...
...WE DON'T GET TO USE THE FRONT DOOR ANYMORE.
KRISTA BABY, THAT YOU?
NO...
IT'S NOT KRISTA, BABY.
WHO THE HELL IS KRISTA?

THERE'LL BE TIME TO TALK ABOUT *KRISTA BABY* LATER. RIGHT NOW--
--I'VE GOT *A FEW OTHER QUESTIONS.*
SO LOOK, WHY DID YOU GUYS SAVE ME FROM THOSE TRUCKERS ANYWAY?
AH, WELL, *AHEM,* I WASN'T GOING TO JUST *STAND BY* AND JUST WATCH, WAS I?
WHY *NOT--*
--MY MOM DID.
NEAR ENOUGH, ANYWAY, WHEN HER *BOYFRIEND* STARTED...
...GOT ANY OF THAT *WHISKY* TO SPARE?

SO LET'S GET THIS *STRAIGHT*. THE *RED ROOM* IS BACK IN BUSINESS, TRADING AS *2R*. THEY'VE GOT AGENTS *HERE* IN THE U.S., AND A U.S. GOVERNMENT LIAISON, THIS GUY *FERRIS*. BUT YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT 2R ACTUALLY DOES?
NO...I...THEY NEVER... WOULDN'T...FERRIS KNOWS... TOLD ME...GATHER DATA, THAT'S ALL. ASK ALL THE...OLD HANDS....WHAT THEY KNEW.
THE *OLD HANDS?* AND YOU NEVER CAME TO *ME?*
NO...FERRIS...TOLD ME... NO...LEAVE HER. NOT...OUR PROBLEM...LEAVE WELL-ENOUGH ALONE...WON'T LIVE...MUCH LONGER ANYWAY...DOESN'T MATTER...
SO *NOW* WHY DON'T YOU TELL US ALL ABOUT *KRISTA BABY?*
NO...PLEASE... DON'T MAKE ME... PLEASE...DON'T WANT TO...
THE DRUGS ARE WEARING OFF, SO HE HAS TO BE PUSHED A LITTLE HARDER...
NO, I BET YOU DON'T. SO WHO IS SHE, THIS *KRISTA?* A MEAT-RACK GIRL?
NO!!! KRISTA'S NOT...*LIKE THAT*... NOT LIKE *THE OTHERS*... SHE'S SO *BEAUTIFUL*... SO *YOUNG*...I WANTED TO...
HOW YOUNG?
...ONLY *SEVENTEEN*...
...SO *BEAUTIFUL*... WANTED TO *LOOK AFTER HER*...TO *LOVE* HER...

MEN ARE SCUM, AREN'T THEY?
UHH...
I MEAN, ALL THE MEN I EVER MET--
TAK TAK
THAT'S IT, LET'S GET OUT OF HERE.
GET WHAT YOU NEEDED?
MORE OR LESS. DOES THE NAME MARTIN FERRIS MEAN--
NATASHA, DON'T YOU THINK--
WHOA, YOU'VE BEEN DRINKING?
A LITTLE, YEAH, LOOK--
YOU GAVE HER WHISKY?
UH...
NATASHA, DON'T YOU THINK ALL MEN ARE SCUM?
RIGHT NOW? YES, I THINK RIGHT NOW I DO.

KA-RRESHSHH!
NAAAAAAAAAAGH!!
WHUMP
WHAT THE *HELL* WAS *THAT?*
THAT WAS JIM KOENIG PAYING *THE PRICE OF BETRAYAL,* I THINK.
YOU THINK HE *JUMPED?* WHEN HE REALIZED WHAT HE'D SPILLED?
MAYBE, YEAH.
ALTHOUGH, PERSONALLY, I'D LIKE TO THINK HE WAS *PUSHED.*
NOW WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THIS FERRIS?

WASHINGTON, D.C.
SO NOW SHE'S IN ATLANTA?
WELL, NO, PROBABLY NOT BY NOW. BUT SHE WAS LAST NIGHT, JUDGING BY THE DAMAGE.
YOU'RE SURE?
OH COME ON, FURY. WHO ELSE DO YOU KNOW WHO CAN SCALE A BUILDING LIKE THAT?
ALL RIGHT, DON'T ANSWER THAT. THE LESS I KNOW ABOUT YOUR CREW OF MASKED WEIRDOS, THE BETTER. BUT KOENIG IS DEAD, THE WIDOW KILLED HIM, AND I'M FRESH OUT OF LEADS.
IT'S TIME FOR SOME INTERAGENCY COOPERATION HERE.
WE'RE LOOKING, TOO. I'LL HAVE SOMEONE CALL YOU IF--
DON'T TRY TO BLOW ME OFF, FURY. YOU'LL BE SORRY YOU--
SORRY? SORRY? I'M ALREADY SORRY.

I'M SORRY THIS ADMINISTRATION SEES FIT TO LET *SCUM* LIKE YOU *OPERATE* IN THE FIRST PLACE. I'M SORRY AN ABOMINATION LIKE THE *NORTH INSTITUTE* WAS EVER *PERMITTED BIRTH.*
I'M SORRY I CAN'T PUT A *BULLET* THROUGH *BOTH* OF YOU *RIGHT NOW.* IF YOU EVER TOUCH ME AGAIN, HUNTER, I'LL *BREAK YOU IN HALF* AND CALL IT SELF-DEFENSE, DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?
SO I GUESS THAT'S A *NO* ON THE INTERAGENCY *COOPERATION,* THEN?
YOU JUST *HAD* ALL THE COOPERATION YOU'RE GOING TO GET OUT OF *ME.*
WELL. THAT WENT WELL.
SLAM
YEAH, *THANKS, KESTREL.*
FOR WHAT?
FOR *STOPPING THAT FROM GOING DOWN.* I THINK I WOULD HAVE *KILLED* HIM.
NOT GOOD FOR YOUR CAREER PROSPECTS, MAX. EVEN *THE NSA* DOESN'T LIKE *SLAUGHTER IN THE RANKS.*
LOOK, *FORGET* FURY. HE'S A *DINOSAUR.* ANOTHER *FIVE YEARS,* HE WON'T RECOGNIZE THE WORLD HE'S LIVING IN.
FROM WHAT THEY'RE SAYING UP AT NORTH, NEITHER WILL *ANYONE ELSE.* THERE'S NO ROAD *BACK* FROM WHAT WE'RE DOING, KESTREL.

Carolina
MOTEL
VACANCY
FREE ROOMS
CABLE TV
MOTEL
EVERYTHING'S *CHANGING,* NAT.
NORTH CAROLINA
NEW *FACES,* NEW WAYS OF *DOING* STUFF. EXTERNAL LIAISONS, *THINK TANKS,* BRIGHT YOUNG THIN--
YEAH, FERRIS...
PHIL. STICK TO THE POINT. FERRIS.
FILTERED THROUGH *PHIL* AND THE *WHISKY,* I GET SOME SENSE OF MY TARGET...
MARTIN FERRIS. EX-*WEST POINT.*
EX-*SPECIAL FORCES.*
EX-*PENTAGON ADVISORY STAFF.*
EXISTS NOW IN SOME *GRAY AREA* UNDER THE *NSA UMBRELLA.*
XXX
Peel-a-Bo
Nast
COMBAT-DECORATED, MARTIAL ARTS SPECIALIST. IMPECCABLE ALPHA MALE CREDENTIALS. *WEAKNESSES--*

--THE USUAL.
I DON'T LIKE THIS, NAT.
YEAH, WELL, REST ASSURED, YOUR DISLIKE FOR IT IS ABOUT A TENTH THE STRENGTH OF MINE.
DRESSED TO KILL'S A STRANGE EXPRESSION.
HEELS YOU CAN BARELY WALK IN, LET ALONE RUN. SKIN EXPOSED ALL OVER, REGARDLESS OF WEATHER. A LOOK THAT SAYS "TAKE ME I'M YOURS."
DRESSED TO BE KILLED, MORE LIKE.
WASHINGTON, D.C.
BUT IF YOU WANT TO REEL IN A SHARK--

--YOU'VE GOT TO PUT *MEAT* ON THE HOOK.
FERRIS ISN'T *MARRIED* LIKE KOENIG. NOT *WEAK ENOUGH* TO WANT TO HAVE HIS CAKE AND EAT IT, TOO.
OH, BABY, YOU ARE *HOT*.
OR MAYBE HE'S *JUST NOT OLD ENOUGH YET*. EITHER WAY, HIS PLACE IS *EMPTY*--
--AND I *KNOW* WE'RE NOT GOING TO BE *DISTURBED*.
YOU *KNOW* WHAT I WANT YOU TO *DO* NOW, BABY?
OHHH, YEAHHH...
I WANT YOU TO *TELL ME*--

--*EVERYTHING* YOU KNOW ABOUT *YOUR FRIENDS* IN 2R.
YOU LITTLE--
AH-AH. I'M THE ONE WITH THE KNIFE, MARTY. I'D KEEP A ***CIVIL TONGUE*** IN YOUR HEAD IF I WERE YOU. ***THAT WAY*** I WON'T BE TEMPTED TO ***REMOVE*** ANY ***EXTERNAL APPENDAGES.***
NOW HOLD STILL, AND TRY NOT TO PANIC. I'M TRAINED TO HANDLE THIS STUFF. JUST A ***LITTLE PRICK*** AND YOU'LL WANT TO TELL ME EVERYTHING I NEED TO KNOW.
FERRIS IS YOUNGER AND HARDER THAN KOENIG, SO I'VE HAD TO GET EXTREME. THE DRUGS ARE A MAXED-UP COCKTAIL OF HALLUCINOGENS AND TELL-THE-TRUTH INCENTIVES.
ON TOP OF THE ALCOHOL, THE SEXUAL AROUSAL AND THEN THE FEAR--

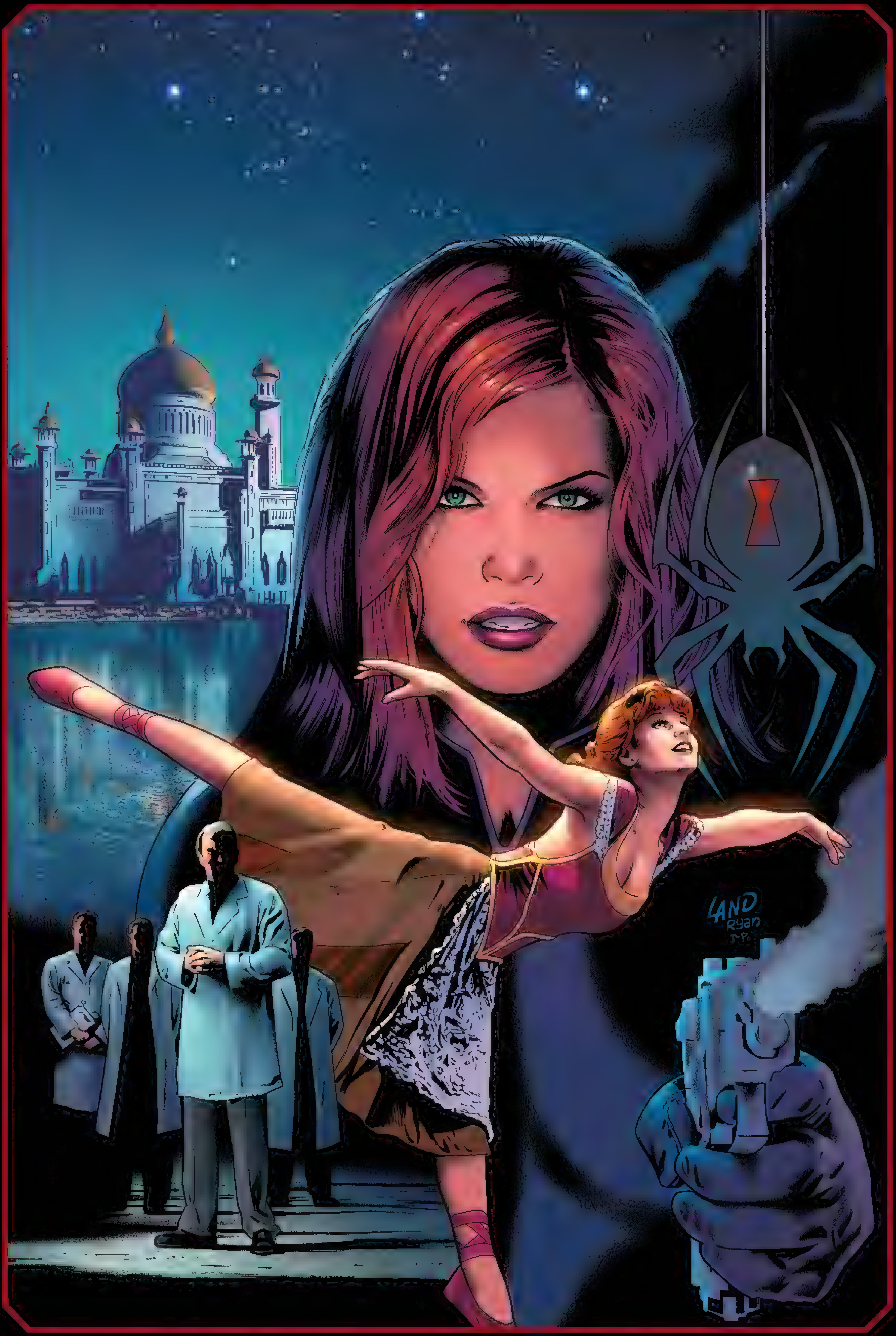
--IT CAN'T BE VERY PLEASANT.
NO, PLEEEEEASE... AAAAIIIIIIEEEEEE!!!!!
--BUT IT SEEMS TO BE WORKING.
GOOOOOOOOOD. NOW. EXSSSSSSSSPLAIN TO MEEEEESH ABOUT THE RUSSSSSSIANSSSS
MOMMMEEEEEEE... PLEA-EA-EA-EA-EASSSE...
THERE...IT'S ALL RIGHT, MARTY. I WON'T LET HER GET YOU. JUST TELL ME ABOUT YOUR GAMES WITH THE RUSSIAN BOYS.
BUT MOMMY. THEY SAID I MUSTN'T SAY--
NOW MARTY, YOU DON'T WANT HER TO COME BACK, DO YOU?
YOU DON'T WANT THAT, DOOOOOOOO YOU?
VERY DARK TRIANGLE
NON WHITE TRIANGLE
FOOLED YOU
BLACK TRIANGLE
SORRY
DITTO
AGAI
NOOOOO, MOMMY, NOOOOO...
A
B
G
C
D
E
WELL, THEN. TELL ME ABOUT THE RUSSIAN BOYS...

EVENTUALLY, I GET EVERYTHING HE KNOWS. MOTHERS USUALLY DO. IT'S NOT AS MUCH AS I'D LIKE, BUT I'M USED TO *DISAPPOINTMENT* IN BEDROOMS LIKE THIS.
MOSCOW... GYNACON...CLEAN UP...SURGICAL...
I LEAVE HIM TO SLEEP IT OFF. SOMEONE'LL COME OVER AND CHECK WHEN HE DOESN'T SHOW UP FOR WORK TOMORROW MORNING.
WON'T DO HIS *REPUTATION* ANY HARM WHEN THEY FIND HIM LIKE THIS.
NEVER *DOES* IF YOU'RE A GUY.
HEY *BABY,* YOU LOOKIN' FOR SOME?
HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA...
KNAAARP
KNAAARP

FROM
Gynacon
NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL A WOMAN
GYNACON? NEVER HEARD OF THEM.
OF COURSE YOU HAVEN'T-- YOU'RE A GUY.
GYNACON MAKES COSMETICS, PHIL. PRODUCTS FOR COSMETIC SURGERY, TOO--
YEAH, THAT'S RIGHT. AT SCHOOL I KNEW THIS GIRL, HER MOM GOT GYNACON BREAST IMPLANTS, THEY COST HER TWENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS EACH. ALL THE MOVIE STARS BUY GYNACON. IT'S, LIKE, THE BEST.
MOST RECENTLY THEY'RE INTO HORMONE REPLACEMENT AND ANTI-AGING TREATMENTS.
I DON'T SEE WHAT THIS HAS TO DO WITH ANYTHING IMPORTANT.
YES, THAT'S BECAUSE, AS SALLY ANNE OBSERVED, YOU'RE NOT A WOMAN. YOU'RE UNDER NO PRESSURE TO CARE ABOUT YOUR LOOKS OR YOUR APPEARANCE.

NAT, COME ON. YOU'RE NOT SAYING *YOU* CARE ABOUT *COSMETICS?*
NO, I PREFER TO SPEND MY MONEY ON *BOOKS* AND *CLIMBING GEAR.* BUT YOU KNOW WHAT THE LAST PRESENT WAS THAT SOMEONE BOUGHT ME?
NOT A ROPE. NOT A BOOK. *PERFUME.* A BIG, EXPENSIVE BOTTLE OF *DESSAIN RED.*
COOL!
BECAUSE I'M A WOMAN, AND THAT'S WHAT WOMEN ARE SUPPOSED TO VALUE ABOVE ALL ELSE. *COSMETIC APPEARANCE.*
WELL, *OKAY.* NEXT BIRTHDAY I'LL GET YOU SOME *DOSTOYEVSKY* AND A HUNDRED METERS OF *HEAVY DUTY LINE.* NONE OF THIS EXPLAINS WHAT *GYNACON* HAS TO DO WITH FERRIS AND HIS *NEW RUSSIAN PLAYMATES.*
FERRIS TOLD ME HE'S BEEN FACILITATING THE LIAISON BETWEEN *GYNACON* AND *2R.* HE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING, BUT YOU WERE RIGHT. IT GOES BACK TO *RUSSIA.* I'VE GOT *MOSCOW ADDRESSES* AND SOME *GIBBERISH* ABOUT *A FIELD IN THE EAST.*
IT'S A *SAFE BET* STACY WHEEDLED THIS MEDUSAGEN OUT OF SOME OLD RED ROOM PAL OF HERS, TO HELP WITH THE PREGNANCY. THE QUESTION IS WHAT IT DOES. YOUR FRIENDS AT THE LAB GOT ANYTHING ON IT YET?
'FRAID NOT. ALL THEY CAN TELL ME IS THEY'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT BEFORE.
THEN I'M GOING TO HAVE TO *GO THERE.*
GO *WHERE?*
MOSCOW.

OOOH, CAN I COME?
NO!!!
AND ANYWAY, IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU WERE IN *BED*, YOUNG LADY. IT'S NEARLY *THREE A.M.*
ANYWAY, I'M NOT GOING TO BE *GONE LONG*. JUST FLY IN AND CHECK IT OUT. MAYBE FIND THIS *FIELD IN THE EAST*.
"SEE WHAT THEY'RE DOING OUT THERE THAT FITS IN WITH A U.S. *COSMETICS CORPORATION*.
"I'LL BE *BACK* BEFORE YOU *KNOW IT*."


LAND
Ryan
J-P.

BLACK WIDOW (2004) #4

“NO PLACE LIKE HOME”

YOU CAN NEVER GO HOME.
MOSCOW
MEMORY COLLIDES WITH CURRENT REALITY. IT'S A CAR WRECK YOU CAN ONLY GET HURT IN.
BOLSHOI WELCOMES
I SHOULDN'T REALLY BE DOING THIS.
I'M SUPPOSED TO BE RUNNING DOWN THE LEADS I TORTURED OUT OF MARTIN FERRIS, NOT WALLOWING IN SAD-CASE NOSTALGIA.
YES, I'M HERE WITH INTERMEDIA PRODUCTIONS. I WAS WONDERING IF I COULD TALK TO ALEX STERELNY. HE'S AN OLD FRIEND, YOU SEE.
STERELNY?
YES, HE'S ONE OF YOUR TRAINERS. BUT MAYBE HE'S RETIRED OR--
I'M SORRY, I'VE WORKED FOR THE BOLSHOI FOR THIRTY YEARS. I DON'T RECOLLECT ANYONE OF THAT NAME. ARE YOU SURE...?

I'M GETTING THAT REACTION A LOT SINCE I GOT HERE.
BACK IN THE *OLD DAYS,* PEOPLE DISAPPEARED WITHOUT A TRACE *ALL THE TIME.* SOMETIMES I EVEN HELPED MAKE IT HAPPEN.
KGB--IT WAS PART OF WHAT WE DID BACK THEN.
Coca-Cola
TDK
SONY
BUT THIS *ISN'T* THE OLD DAYS.
AND HALF THESE OLD FRIENDS I CAN'T FIND--THEY WERE *STATE-FAVORED APPARATCHIKS.* THERE SHOULD BE *SOME* TRACE.
IT FEELS LIKE SEARCHING A *CITY* OF *GHOSTS.*
NO, *WORSE* THAN THAT. IT FEELS LIKE *I'M* THE GHOST.
HAUNTING A PAST THAT'S *DEAD AND GONE.*
MY HEAD HURTS.

BUT DAMN IT, I *REMEMBER* ALEX STERELNY. HE MADE ME INTO A *DANCER.*
...FORTY-ONE, FORTY-TWO, FORTY-THREE, *COME ON,* NATASHA...
COME ON, NATASHA, ENOUGH DAYDREAMING. BACK TO WORK NOW.
YEAH, YEAH, BACK TO WORK. FORGET YOUR OLD FRIENDS, START LOOKING FOR YOUR NEW ENEMIES.
BUT NOTHING'S THE WAY I REMEMBER IT. *NOTHING.*
IN THE OLD DAYS, WE WERE MADE TO *FEAR THE WEST.*
WE WERE TOLD THEY'D COME WITH *TANKS* AND *MISSILES...*

...AND *DESTROY* WHAT WE'D *BUILT.*
INSTEAD, THEY CAME WITH *MONEY.*
AND WE *HELPED* THEM TEAR IT ALL DOWN OURSELVES.
NOW THE GAP BETWEEN *RICH AND POOR* IS WIDER THAN IT'S *EVER BEEN.*
AND THE NAME *NATASHA* HAS A *NEW MEANING.*

SOMETIMES I WONDER IF I SHOULD HAVE BEEN HERE, TRYING TO STOP IT ALL COMING TO THIS.
TOO LATE NOW.
HOW YOU DOING, NAT?
GETTING NOWHERE FAST. I CHECKED THE FIRST COUPLE OF ADDRESSES I GOT OUT OF FERRIS. THERE'S NOTHING THERE.
IT'S LIKE SOMEONE ELSE GOT HERE AHEAD OF ME.
MAYBE SOMEONE DID. FERRIS COULD HAVE TALKED.
NOT LIKELY. THE DRUGS I PUMPED INTO HIM, I DOUBT HE REMEMBERS ANYTHING ABOUT THAT LITTLE SESSION BEYOND SOME BAD DREAMS. I THINK...
OW-W-W, NOW IT'S SPITTING!
PHIL, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
TEACHING THE KID HOW TO DO AN ENGLISH BREAKFAST. WHY?
ALBUQUERQUE

DOESN'T MATTER. I'M GOING OUT AGAIN. LISTEN, PHIL...
YEAH, LISTENING.
YOU LOOK AFTER SALLY ANNE. KEEP HER SAFE.
WELL, OF COUR-
KLIK
ANOTHER DERELICT BUILDING, ANOTHER BROKEN LEAD.
FERRIS'S LIST IS STARTING TO LOOK LIKE A FIGMENT OF--

ONE THING YOU LEARN FROM A CAREER AS A SPY.
THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS *COINCIDENCE.*
AND WHEN THINGS APPEAR TO COINCIDE...
...YOU NEED TO BE READY.
THE SECURITY GUARD DIDN'T LIE ABOUT *THIS,* AT LEAST. NO ONE'S BEEN IN HERE FOR *MONTHS.*
YEARS, MAYBE.

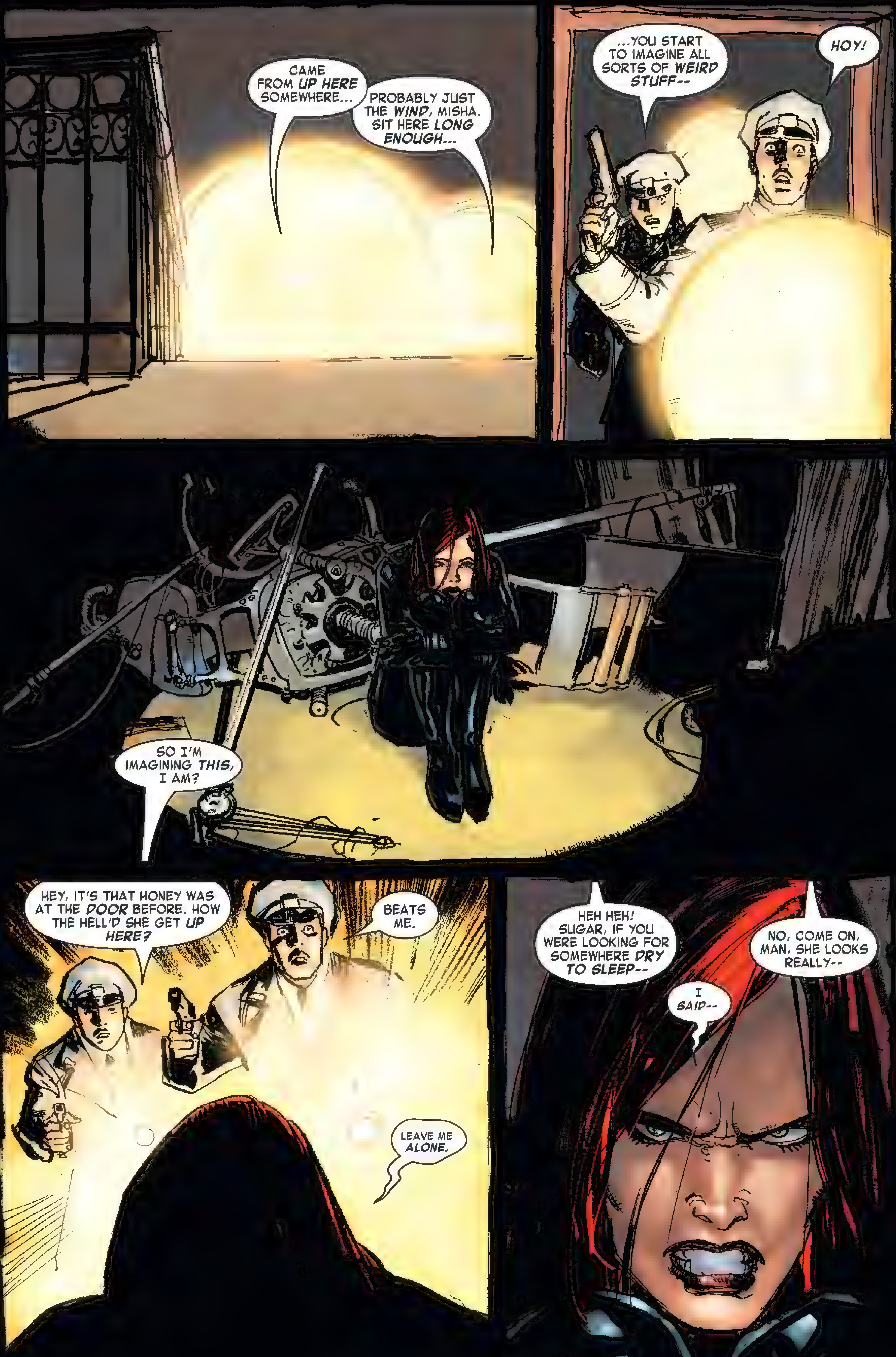
WHOLE DAMN PLACE IS LIKE A MAUSOLEUM.
IT'S ENOUGH TO GIVE YOU THE CREEPS.
...VERY BRAVE...
YOU'RE GOING TO BE A *GOOD GIRL* FOR US, AREN'T YOU?
GOING TO *TAKE YOUR MEDICINE*...

...RESPONDING WELL TO THE DOSAGE.
OF COURSE. SHE'S *STRONG*.
IS SHE *UNDER* NOW?
PRETTY MUCH.
ALRIGHT. *LISTEN, NATASHA.* I'M GOING TO COUNT. AND I WANT YOU TO *COUNT WITH ME.*
FORTY-ONE. FORTY-TWO. FORTY-THREE...
FORTY ONE, FO-O-O-O-ORTY TWO. FOR-FOR-FOR...
...COME *ON*, NATASHA...
OH, NO...PLEASE, NO...
NOOOOO!
KRESH

LANGLEY, VIRGINIA
I *BEG* YOUR PARDON?
WHAT IS THIS, THE ***PROM DATE*** FROM HELL? I SAID ***NO.*** WANT ME TO ***SPELL*** IT FOR YOU?
YOU F--
I THINK WHAT MAX HERE IS ***TRYING*** TO SAY IS THAT WE'D LIKE SOME INTERAGENCY COOPERATION.
OH, IS THAT WHAT YOU THINK HE'S ***TRYING*** TO ***SAY?*** WELL, MAYBE YOU SHOULD ENROLL HIM IN ***CHARM SCHOOL*** SO HE CAN LEARN HOW TO ***EXPRESS HIMSELF VERBALLY.***
MEANTIME, I LOST MY JOB TO DOWNSIZING ***TWICE*** WHILE THE CLOWNS WHO SET UP ***THE NORTH INSTITUTE*** WERE IN GOVERNMENT.
YOU WANT SUPERCOMPUTING CAPACITY? GO LOOK FOR IT IN ***THE STREAMLINED PRIVATE SECTOR*** WHERE YOU BELONG.
WE'LL BE BACK-- I'LL GET ***N.S.A. CLEARANCE...***
ICT MONITORING
GOOD. GO GET IT. MEANWHILE, ***GET OUT OF MY FACE.***

WELL, THAT'S FURY *AND* LANGLEY YOU'VE BLOWN. WHO DO YOU WANT TO YELL ABUSE AT NEXT--*THE FBI? PENTAGON ADVISORY,* MAYBE?
THINK *YOU* CAN DO ANY BETTER?
IS THAT A TRICK QUESTION?
THAT *YOU,* PHIL?
YEAH, WHO *ELSE* IS IT GOING TO BE ON *THIS NUMBER?*
PHIL, SHUT UP AND *LISTEN.* YOU'RE IN TROUBLE. I JUST HAD A VISIT FROM *NORTH.*
NORTH? THAT'S UP AND RUNNING THESE DAYS?
OH, *YEAH.* UP AND RUNNING, AND *COMING YOUR WAY.*
SKREEEK
SOON AS THEY *FIND A CRACK,* PHIL. AND THAT'S JUST A MATTER OF *TIME.*

OFF THE FLORIDA COAST
NO, IT IS A MATTER OF COMPETENCE. COMPETENCE, MR. MCMASTERS, WHICH I HAVE AND YOUR FRIENDS AT NORTH DO NOT.
SON, I KNOW YOU'VE KILLED MORE DANGEROUS MEN THAN I'VE HAD MIAMI WORKING GIRLS--
--AND I SAW WHAT YOU DID TO JACK MULLAN WHEN HE CAME AFTER ME. IN FACT, I'LL PROBABLY NEVER GET HIS BLOOD OUT OF MY UPHOLSTERY. BUT--
MULLAN WAS NOTHING. A CHEAP MERCENARY IN THE PAY OF COCAINE-ADDLED FOOLS. IN THE RED ROOM, I WAS TRAINED TO KILL REAL WARRIORS, MEN OF CALIBER. THAT IS MY PROFESS--
BLEEE-BLEEE
YES, AND MAYBE IF YOU'D GONE AFTER THIS WOMAN YOURSELF, YOU'D HAVE KILLED HER, TOO.
BUT YOU DIDN'T. YOU FARMED IT OUT AND THE MAN YOU SENT FAILED. I CAN'T AFFORD ANY MORE MISCALCULATIONS. NORTH WILL--
WELL, THERE YOU GO, SON. SOMETHING ELSE FOR YOU TO WORRY ABOUT.
YES?
VASSILY, DEAREST...
...THERE ARE THINGS WE NEED TO DISCUSS...


CAME FROM *UP HERE* SOMEWHERE...
PROBABLY JUST THE *WIND*, MISHA. SIT HERE *LONG ENOUGH*...
...YOU START TO IMAGINE ALL SORTS OF *WEIRD STUFF*--
HOY!
SO I'M IMAGINING *THIS*, I AM?
HEY, IT'S THAT HONEY WAS AT THE *DOOR* BEFORE. HOW THE HELL'D SHE GET *UP HERE?*
BEATS ME.
LEAVE ME *ALONE*.
HEH HEH! SUGAR, IF YOU WERE LOOKING FOR SOMEWHERE *DRY TO SLEEP*--
NO, COME ON, MAN, SHE LOOKS REALLY--
I *SAID*--

LEAVE ME ALONE!
AAAAGH!
UGH!
NO, PLEASE, GOD, PLEASE--
DON'T KILL ME--

SK-KING
GUURGH!
BLAM
YOU ARE *ONE OF THEM,* AREN'T YOU?
YOU HAD BETTER COME WITH ME.
SOUNDED LIKE A *GUNSHOT* TO ME.
HOY, MISHA! YOU *OKAY* UP THERE?
FOR THE TIME IT TAKES ME TO *GET A GRIP,* I LET HIM DRAG ME ALONG LIKE SOME *MOVIE FEMALE IN PERIL.*
AND THEN I *WAKE UP.*
ALL RIGHT, THAT'S *FAR ENOUGH. WHO ARE YOU?*
COME, WE HAVE NO *TIME* TO--
I *SAID,* WHO ARE YOU?

VERY WELL. GRIGOR IVANOVICH PCHELINTSOV. ONE-TIME PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOTECHNICS. AND YOU ARE BLACK WIDOW. ENCHANTED TO MEET YOU.
NOW PLEASE--
--WE DO NOT HAVE MUCH TIME FOR NICETIES.
EITHER TRUST ME...
...OR FIND YOUR OWN WAY OUT.
GOOD. THIS WAY.
NOW THAT THEY THINK WE'VE CLIMBED OUT IN THE RAIN...
...WE CAN STAY HERE IN THE DRY.

THEY WON'T CHECK *INSIDE* AS WELL? CHECK FOR *FOOTPRINTS?*
THESE ARE NOT *RED ROOM CADRES*, MY DEAR. THEY ARE *NIGHT WATCHMEN*. AND IN THESE TIMES OF *MARKET* FORCES, ONE HIRES THE *CHEAPEST*, NOT THE *BEST*.
ALCOHOLIC *EX-COPS*, AFGHANISTAN VETERANS WITH *HEROIN DEPENDENCY*, SOME *REDUNDANT KGB MUSCLE* WITHOUT THE *BRAINS* TO DO *ANYTHING ELSE*.
THEY'RE NOT *BAD MEN* MOSTLY, BUT NOR ARE THEY THE *CREAM* OF OUR GREAT NATION'S ENFORCEMENT POTENTIAL.
I FIND THEM RELATIVELY EASY TO OUTWIT, AND I *KNOW* THE *BUILDING* FAR BETTER THAN THEY DO. I *WORKED* HERE FOR MANY YEARS, YOU SEE.
NOW, PERHAPS IRONICALLY, I *LIVE* HERE.
PLEASE EXCUSE THE *SMELL*. THERE ARE WORKING SHOWERS THAT I USE ELSEWHERE IN THE BUILDING WHEN I CAN, BUT AS YET, I FIND IT *DIFFICULT* TO WASH MY CLOTHES WITH ANY *REGULARITY*.
IN ANY CASE, YOU ARE MOST WELCOME. SOME *TEA*, PERHAPS?

YOU CALLED ME *BLACK WIDOW--*
YES--A RUDE GENERALIZATION, I *KNOW.* BUT THERE WAS LITTLE TIME FOR ASKING *NAMES.*
BUT YOU *RECOGNIZE* ME?
NOT *YOU* PERSONALLY, NO. BUT THE *TYPE,* YES. THERE WERE CERTAIN *SIMILARITIES* IN YOU ALL.
ALL???
YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT *YELENA BELOVA,* RIGHT?
YEL--?
OH--*HER.* OH, MY GOODNESS, NO. BELOVA WAS A, AN *ABERRATION.* NOTHING TO DO WITH THE *REAL* BLACK WIDOW PROGRAM. I BELIEVE SHE MODELS *FETISH LINGERIE* THESE DAYS.
NO, NO, I'M TALKING ABOUT THE *TWENTY-SEVEN ORIGINAL BLACK WIDOW DEEP-COVER AGENTS* WE DEPLOYED IN CHINA AND THE WEST BACK IN THE OLD DAYS.
MORE TEA?

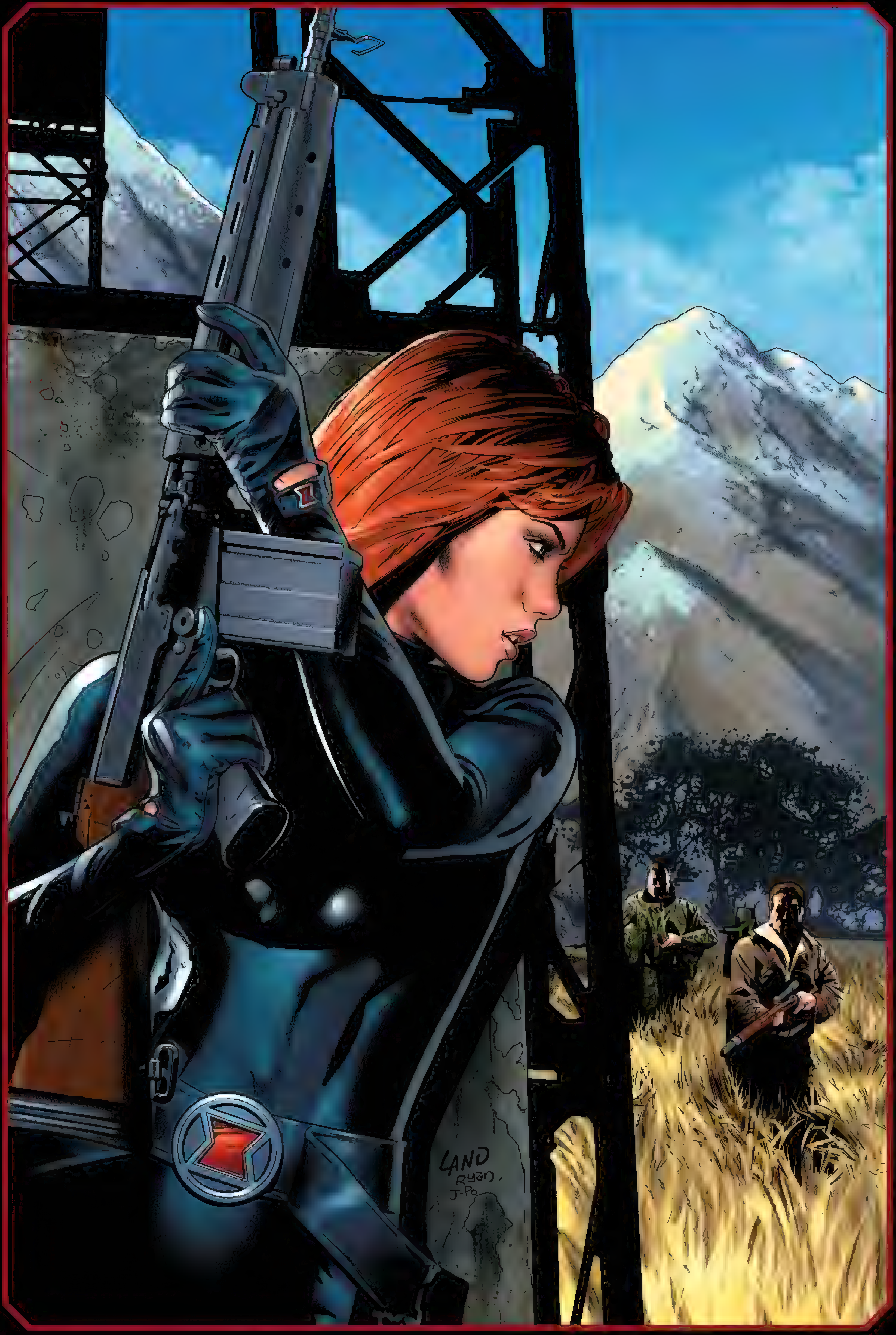
WHAT DID YOU PEOPLE DO TO ME?
I REMEMBER *THAT ROOM* BACK THERE. BUT I-I REMEMBER...*BALLET CLASSES*...THE *BOLSHOI*...
IT *HURTS.*
YES, IF I WERE YOU, I'D TRY NOT TO *THINK* DIRECTLY ABOUT IT. PART OF THE *CONDITIONING,* YOU SEE. *PSYCHOCHEMICAL,* VERY *CRUDE* BACK THEN, BUT *VERY POWERFUL.*
YOU CAN *ENJOY* THE MEMORIES THEMSELVES, THAT'S WHAT THEY WERE *PUT THERE* FOR.
BUT IF YOU TRY TO *THINK LOGICALLY* ABOUT IT, WELL, THERE'S A *DETERRENT* EFFECT. *HEADACHE,* THEN *NAUSEA. UNCONSCIOUSNESS,* EVENTUALLY.
I DON'T BELIEVE YOU.
THERE, YOU SEE. *THAT'S* THE CONDITIONING.
IT REALLY WAS *STATE-OF-THE-ART* BACK THEN--
I DON'T BELIEVE YOU! WHY WOULD YOU *DO* SOMETHING LIKE THAT? WHY *BALLET?*
WELL, WHAT LITTLE GIRL *DOESN'T* WANT TO BE A *BALLERINA?* YOU WERE AN *ORPHAN* LIKE ALL THE OTHERS. THE IDEA WAS TO GIVE YOU SOMETHING *ROSY AND PERFECT* TO REMEMBER THE *MOTHERLAND* BY. TO KEEP YOU *LOYAL,* YOU SEE.
BUT OF COURSE, IF YOU *THOUGHT* LOGICALLY ABOUT IT...
I DON'T...
...WELL, IF YOU WERE A *BOLSHOI BALLERINA,* FOR ONE THING, YOUR *FEET* WOULD BE HORRIBLY *MAIMED* FROM ALL THE *DANCING* ON *BLOCKS.*
THEY'RE *NOT* THOUGH, ARE THEY?
I--

I'M REALLY VERY SORRY TO DO THIS TO YOU.
VLURRRGH URGH
WHY? WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?
YOU FIXED ME LIKE THIS WHEN I WAS A DEFENSELESS CHILD. WHY THE SUDDEN ATTACK OF CONSCIENCE NOW?
I--MY DEAR, YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND. IT WAS A DIFFERENT TIME. WE BELIEVED IN OUR COUNTRY, IN THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION. IN WHAT WE WERE DOING. WE WERE PATRIOTS.
THAT'S A LOUSY EXCUSE FOR BAD BEHAVIOR. ALWAYS HAS BEEN.
WELL, PATRIOT. FEEL LIKE DYING FOR YOUR COUNTRY RIGHT NOW?
UHH, I'D REALLY RATHER NOT.
I GUESSED. WELL, HERE'S YOUR ESCAPE CLAUSE, GRIGOR IVANOVICH: MEDUSAGEN.
MED--?
DON'T KNOW IT? WHAT A SHAME.
NO, NO, LOOK. THAT'S NOT MY DEPARTMENT, PLEASE. THAT'S BIOTECH. THEY DID ALL THAT WORK AT THE URALS COMPLEX.

THE URALS?
YES, YES, THERE'S STILL A FIELD STATION OUT THERE. DISUSED BUT--
A FIELD IN THE EAST?
LOOKS LIKE YOU MISS THE CHANCE OF A GLORIOUS DEATH FOR YOUR COUNTRY AFTER ALL.
OH, THANK YOU, OH, THANK GOD FOR THAT.
YEAH, WELL DON'T GO THANKING HIM JUST YET. I'M GOING TO NEED YOU TO TAKE ME TO THIS FIELD STATION.
TAKE--?
BUT IT'S TWO THOUSAND KILOMETERS FROM HERE!
SO? WHERE'S YOUR SENSE OF ADVENTURE, GRIGOR IVANOVICH?
LOOK, THERE'S NO AIRPORT CLOSE. NO GOOD ROAD. OFFICIALLY THE SITE DOES NOT EVEN EXIST. IT'S IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE.

WE'D NEED TRANSPORT. *ALL-TERRAIN* TRANSPORT. AN *ARMY JEEP*, AT LEAST.
OH, *THAT* ISN'T GOING TO BE A PROBLEM.
SO YOU WANT TO GO FOR A *RIDE*, BABY?
VERY MUCH SO, YES.
OUT.

GET IN.
GOT MY CLOTHES THERE?
UH, YES, I--
GOOD. FIRST FUEL STOP YOU CAN HAVE YOUR COAT BACK. MEANWHILE, IT'S GOING TO BE A LONG JOURNEY. HOW ABOUT WE PASS THE TIME WITH SOME STORYTELLING?
YOU CAN START WITH THE BLACK WIDOW PROGRAM. EVERYTHING YOU DID FOR THEM. EVERYTHING YOU KNOW.
BUT THIS WILL MAKE YOU ILL! YOU'VE SEEN WHAT THE ADVERSE REACTIONS ARE LIKE WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR PAST.
Phenoany
Military Grade
Extreme
High-Potency
Painkiller
CAUTION!
Use as Directe
YOU'RE TOO KIND, GRIGOR IVANOVICH. NOW START TALKING. DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME.
I'LL COPE.


LAND
Ryan
J-Po

BLACK WIDOW (2004) #5

“A FIELD IN THE EAST”

SOUTHEAST OF THE URALS
ON PAPER IT ALWAYS LOOKS SO CLEAN AND CONTROLLED.
YOU'D BARELY THINK IT HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH HUMAN BEINGS AT ALL.
SO...?
SO BUILDING A MOLECULE THIS COMPLEX WON'T BE EASY OR CHEAP.
COST IS NOT AN ISSUE. CAN YOU DO IT...?
OH YES, VASSILY. FOR THE MONEY YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, YOUR AMERICAN FRIENDS CAN HAVE EVERYTHING THEY DESIRE.
I ONLY HOPE THEY CAN STOMACH IT.

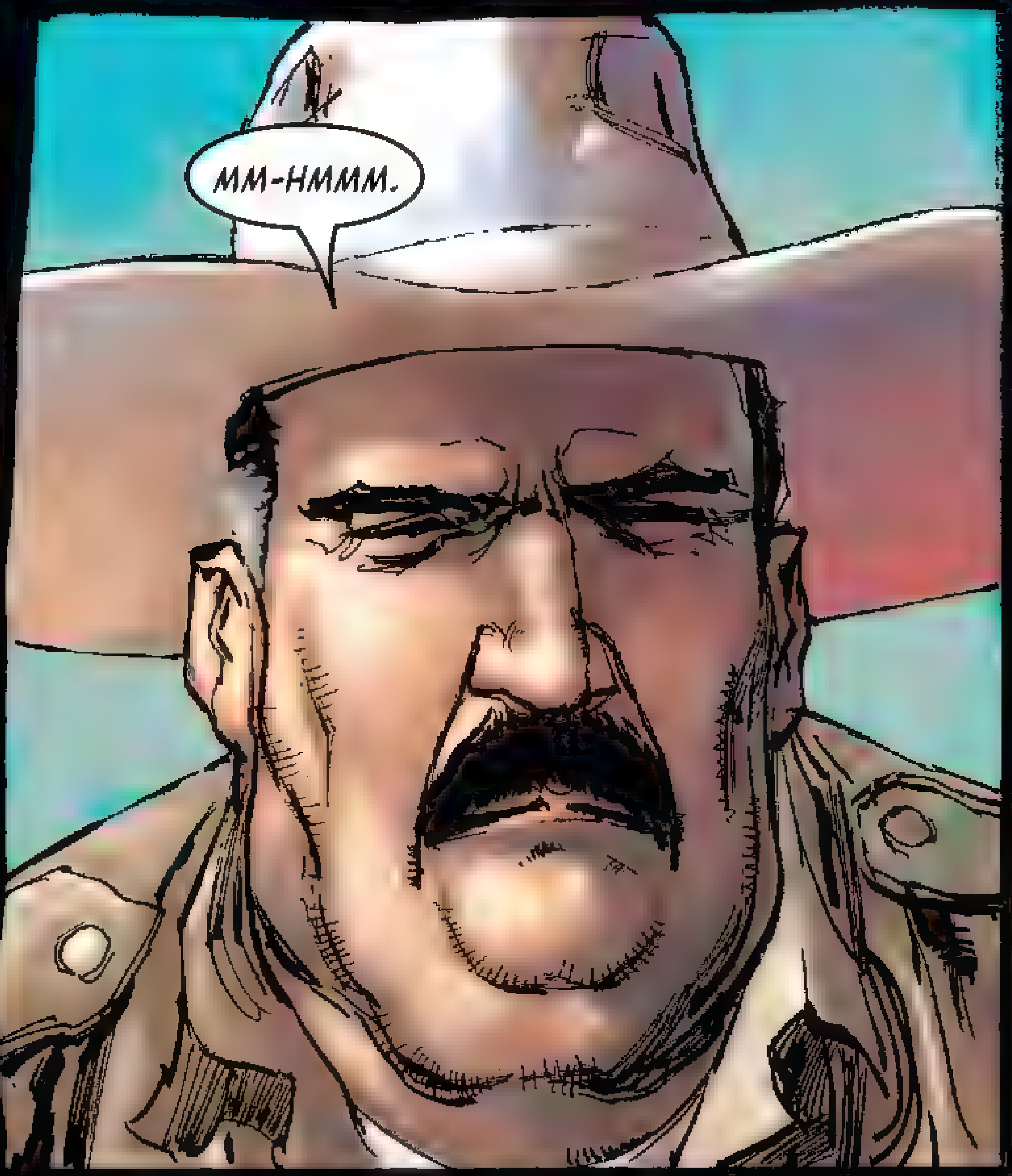
GLURRRRRRRRGH!!!!!!!!
ARE YOU--
I'M **FINE.** HOW MUCH FURTHER IS IT?
IT HASN'T BEEN A GOOD TRIP.
JUST OVER THOSE HILLS. WE'RE NEARLY THERE.
A LONG, HARD TREK IN A 4-WHEEL DRIVE **THE POLICE** ARE PROBABLY LOOKING FOR BY NOW.
AND I'VE SPENT MOST OF IT FINDING OUT MY MEMORIES ARE ABOUT AS **RELIABLE** AS A **STALIN-ERA ENCYCLOPEDIA.**
THE ONES WHERE THE TELEPHONE AND THE FLYING MACHINE WERE INVENTED BY **RUSSIANS,** WHERE FAMOUS PEOPLE AND EVEN ENTIRE TOWNS COULD JUST **DISAPPEAR** FROM ONE EDITION TO THE NEXT.
IT SEEMS MOST OF THE **GOOD** THINGS I REMEMBER FROM BEFORE I BECAME THE BLACK WIDOW **NEVER HAPPENED AT ALL.**
SO I'M LEFT WITH THE BAD...AND **STOMACH CRAMPS, HEADACHE AND TREMBLING** EVERY TIME I TRY TO **THINK** ABOUT IT.
GRIGOR IVANOVICH AND HIS KIND AT THE RED ROOM DID A FINE JOB OF **CONDITIONING** ME.

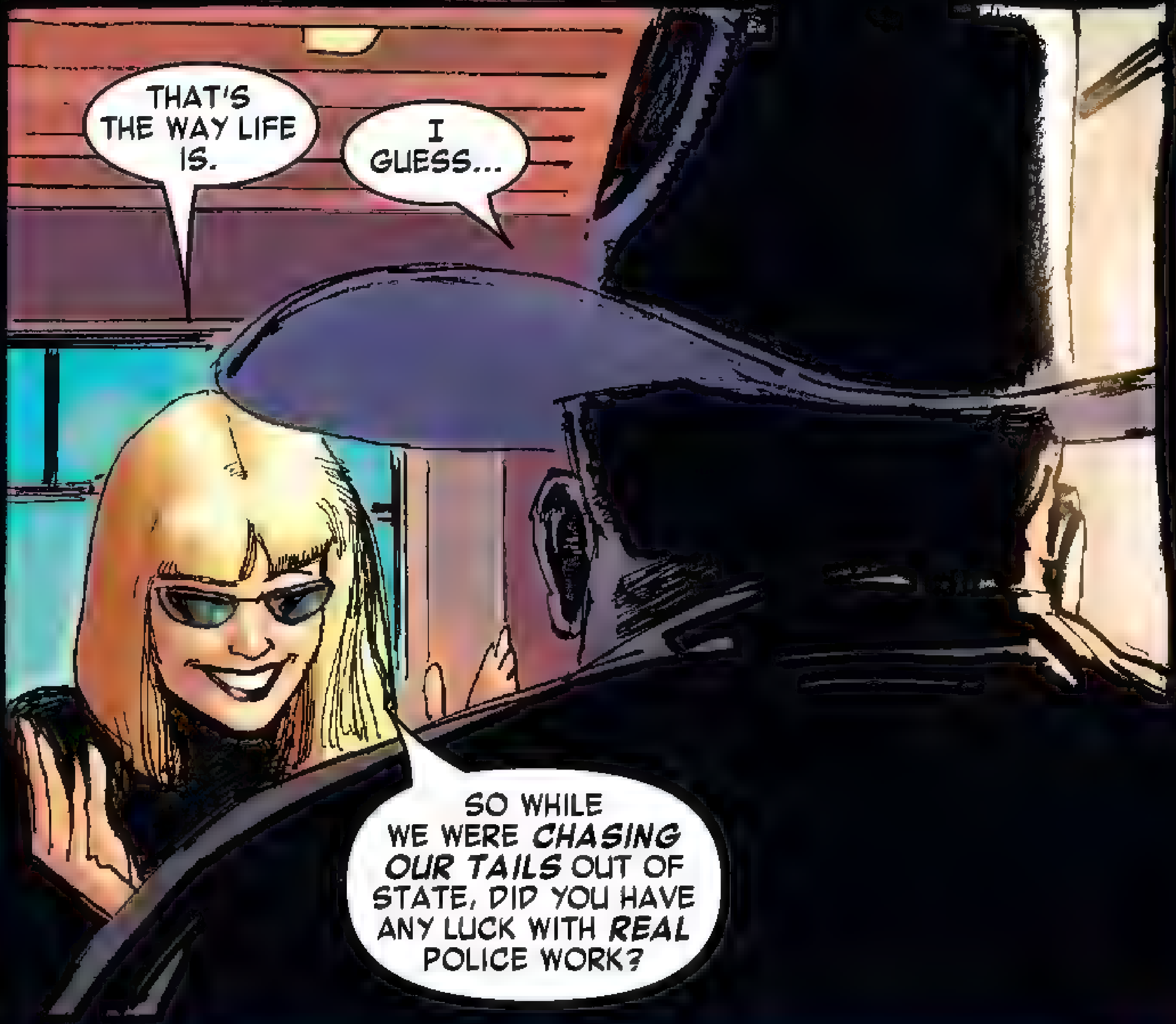
I THINK I'D KILL GRIGOR FOR HIS PART IN IT ALL--
--IF HE WEREN'T SO *USEFUL.*
OKAY, PAL, TIME TO SAY GOOD NIGHT...
I REALLY WOULDN'T IF I WERE YOU.
WHO--?
THROW THE RIFLE DOWN.
GOOD. NOW *YOU* JUMP.
BUT--

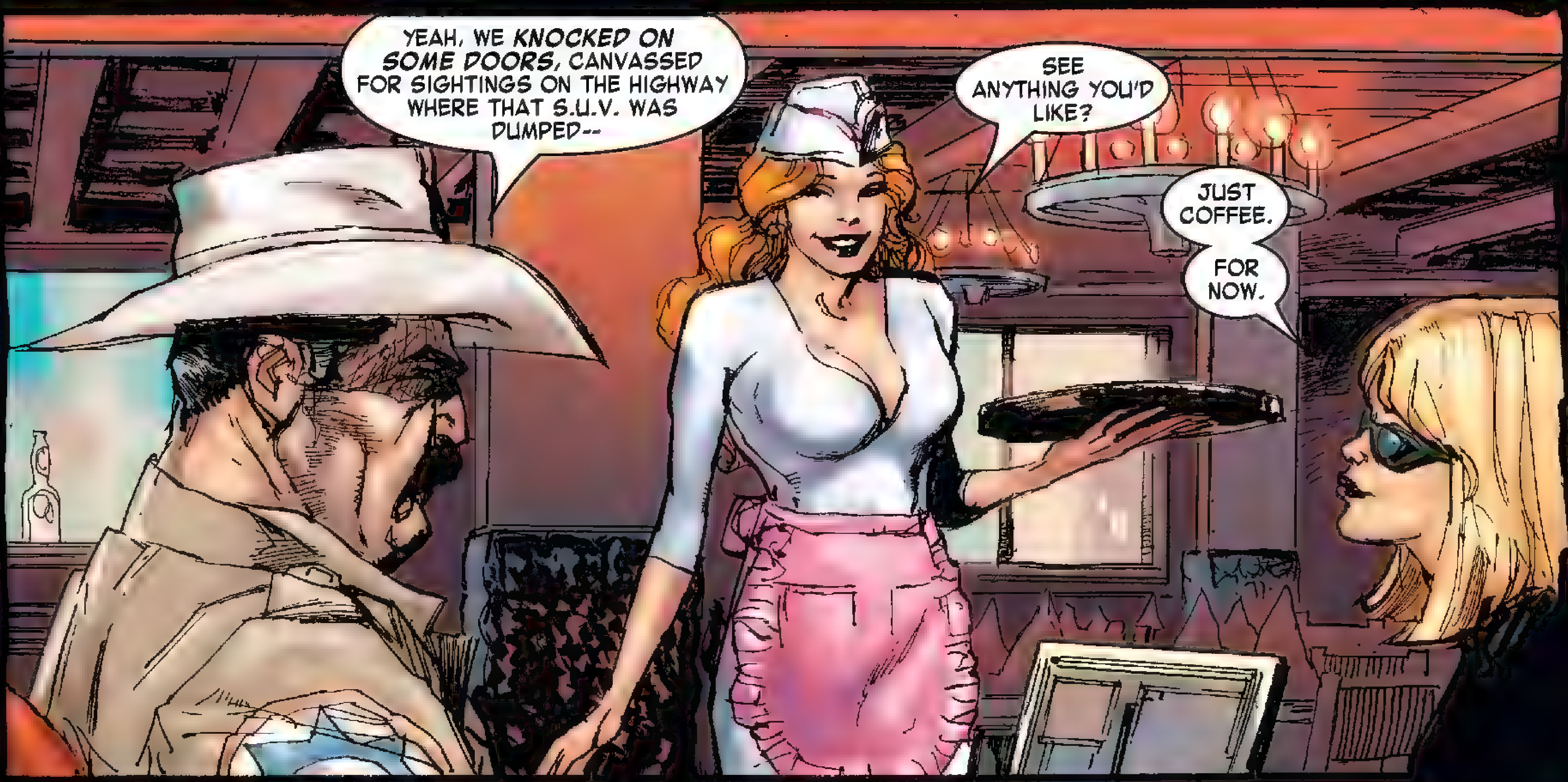
AAAAGH!
WHUMP!
NYYAAAGH!
AAAGH, MY LEG, MY F--
NOW THEN...
...YOU DON'T LIVE AROUND HERE, DO YOU? WHERE ARE YOU PEOPLE *BASED?* WHO'S GIVING THE ORDERS?

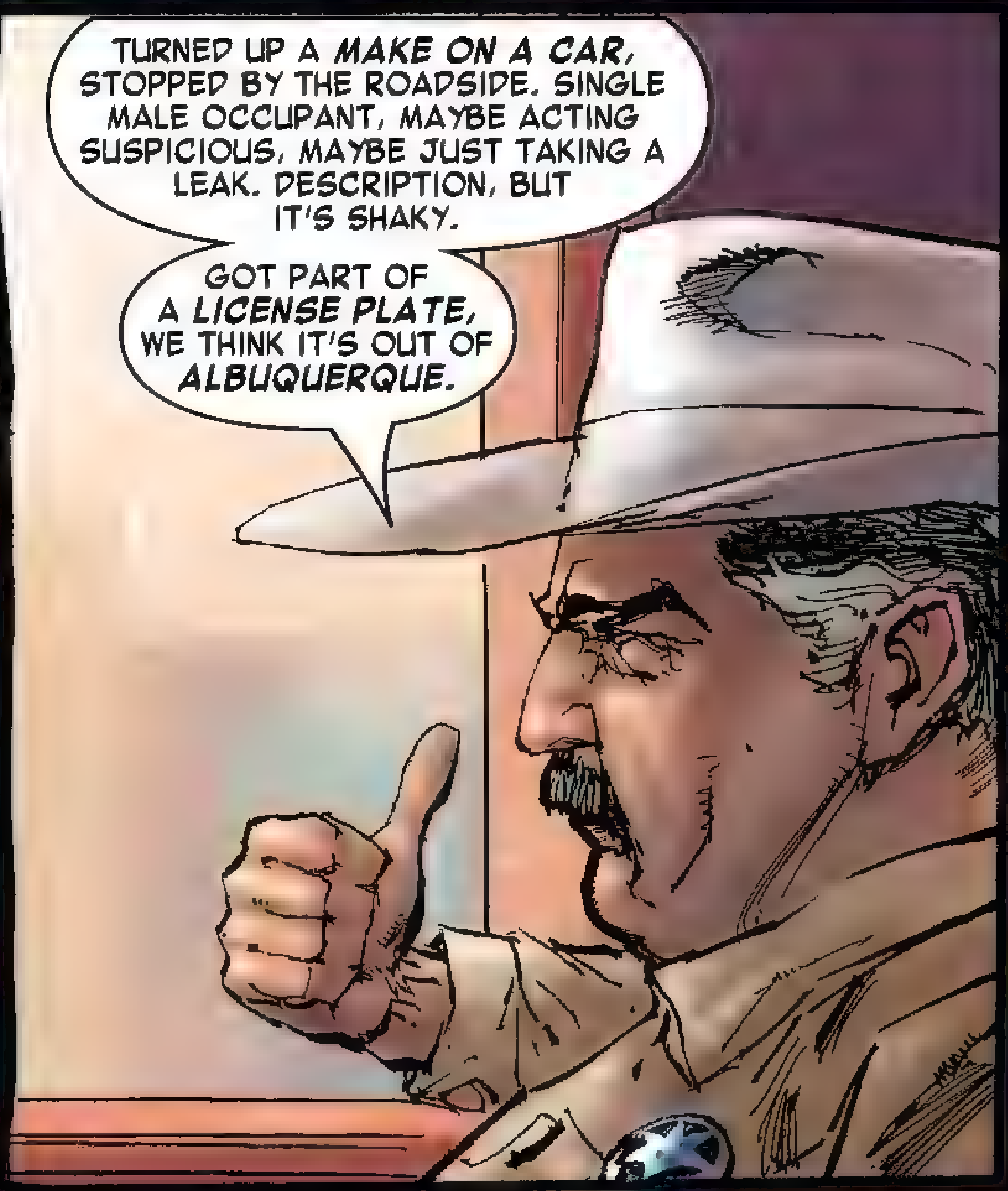
I...WILL NOT...TELL YOU *ANYTHING*...
NOT *THIS* AGAIN.
SUIT YOURSELF.
I SAW *DOG TURDS* ON THE WAY IN. GOT TO BE A *WILD PACK* AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE.
YOU BE SURE AND *SCREAM* IF THEY SHOW UP.
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
TO LOOK AROUND.
BUT HE'S *HURT*. YOU *CAN'T*--
YOU'RE ON THIN ICE GIVING ME *MORAL LECTURES*, GRIGOR IVANOVICH.
AND I WASN'T JOKING ABOUT THOSE *DOGS*. I'D WAIT IN THE *CAR* IF I WERE YOU.

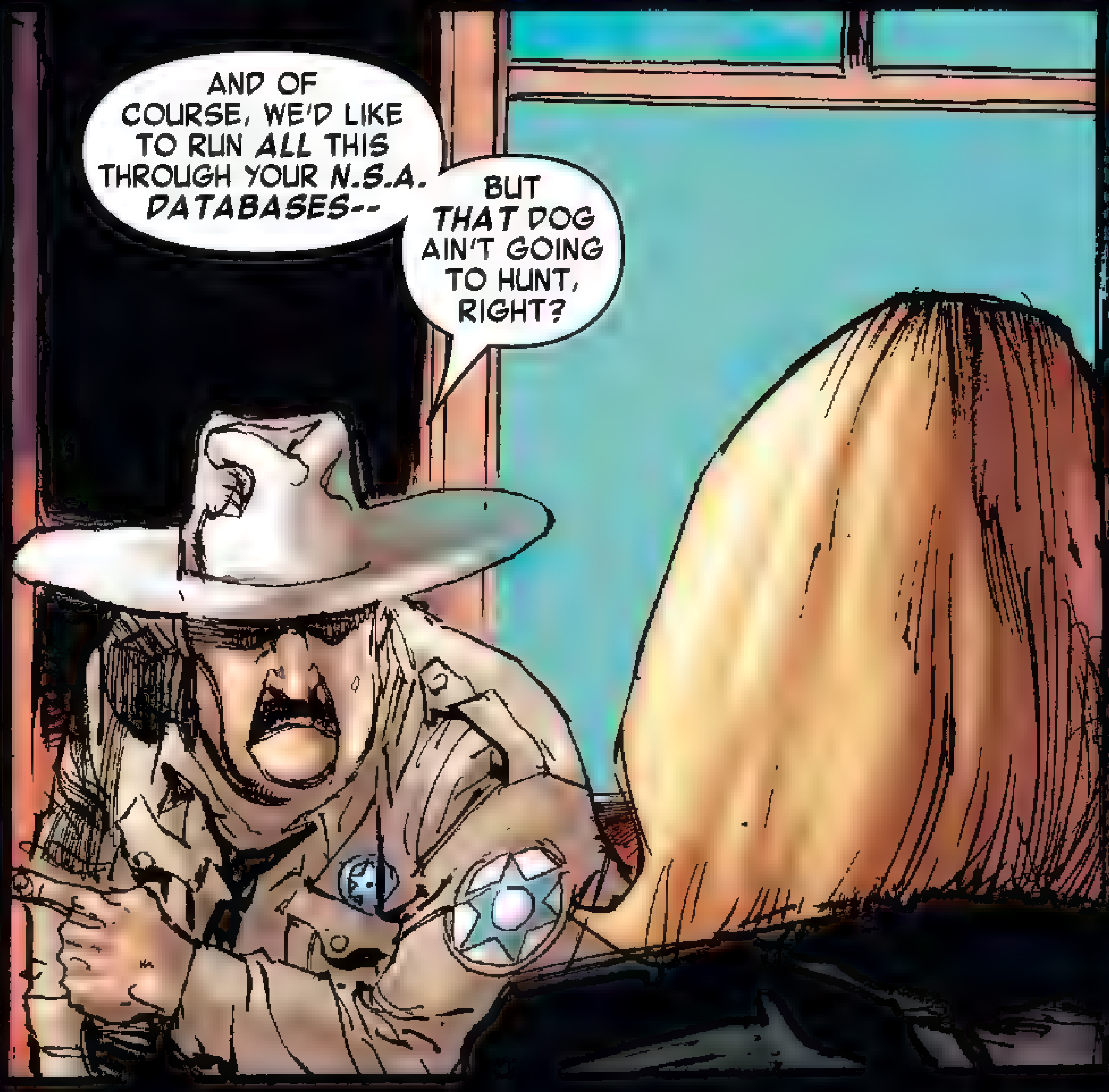
I AM NOT WAITING IN THE DAMN CAR!
YES, YOU ARE. I LOVE YOU DEARLY, MAX, BUT I'M SICK OF THIS MACHO KICK WE'RE ON. NOW YOU GIVE ME SOME TIME ALONE WITH THIS GUY. GO FOR A WALK, IF YOU HAVE TO.
Sant
Dominic
Ho
SHERIFF
NEW MEXICO
WON'T BE LONG.
THERE'S SOME SPECIAL REASON YOU HAD TO MEET HIM IN THIS DUMP?
YES. I LIKE THE COFFEE IN THIS DUMP.
MA'AM.
SHERIFF. THANKS SO MUCH FOR COMING IN TO SEE ME. I APPRECIATE YOU TAKING THE TIME.
YOUR PARTNER'S NOT COMING IN, THEN?
NO.
WELL, I SURE APPRECIATE THAT, MA'AM. MAN'S A SERIOUS A--
Hotel
LET'S NOT GO THERE, PLEASE, SHERIFF. HE IS MY PARTNER.
AND ONCE, UNDER FIRE, HE SAVED MY LIFE AT VERY GREAT RISK TO HIS OWN.


MM-HMMM.


THAT'S THE WAY LIFE IS.
I GUESS...
SO WHILE WE WERE *CHASING OUR TAILS* OUT OF STATE, DID YOU HAVE ANY LUCK WITH *REAL* POLICE WORK?


YEAH, WE *KNOCKED ON SOME DOORS,* CANVASSED FOR SIGHTINGS ON THE HIGHWAY WHERE THAT S.U.V. WAS DUMPED--
SEE ANYTHING YOU'D LIKE?
JUST COFFEE.
FOR NOW.


TURNED UP A *MAKE ON A CAR,* STOPPED BY THE ROADSIDE. SINGLE MALE OCCUPANT, MAYBE ACTING SUSPICIOUS, MAYBE JUST TAKING A LEAK. DESCRIPTION, BUT IT'S SHAKY.
GOT PART OF A *LICENSE PLATE,* WE THINK IT'S OUT OF *ALBUQUERQUE.*


AND OF COURSE, WE'D LIKE TO RUN *ALL* THIS THROUGH YOUR *N.S.A. DATABASES--*
BUT *THAT* DOG AIN'T GOING TO HUNT, RIGHT?

NNNNNNRRRRGH
NNNNNNNNRRRRGH
AAGH, NO, NO, HELP, PLEASE...
NO, NO, GOD, PLEASE, I'LL TELL Y--
NNNNNNRRRRGH
NNRAAGH NNRAAGH
AAAGH!
KRAK
LEAVING IT A BIT LATE, AREN'T WE?

OKAY, NOW LET'S TALK SENSIBLY. CORRECT ANSWERS GET YOU ONE OF THESE LITTLE SWEETIES, YOUR LIFE AND A RIDE OUT OF HERE.
INCORRECT ANSWERS, WELL--
--ENOUGH INCORRECT ANSWERS AND YOUR FOUR-LEGGED FRIENDS THERE'LL BE PLAYING FETCH WITH YOUR FEMURS TONIGHT.
SO WHAT'S IT GOING TO BE?
HE TALKS.
I CAN'T MAKE UP MY MIND IF I'M HAPPY ABOUT IT OR NOT.
BUT I KEEP MY PROMISES.
AND HOWEVER INCREDIBLE THE DETAILS SEEM, I THINK HE'S TELLING ME THE TRUTH.
I THINK THIS IS JOURNEY'S END.

FREEPORT, GRAND BAHAMA
MMMGHGHGH!
WHAT'D YOU SAY?
SHLIK
GAAGH!
CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP
REMARKABLE. AND CERTAINLY BETTER THAN YOUR PREDECESSOR.
CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP
BUT NOT GOOD ENOUGH.

I HAD HOPED THAT MR. MCMASTERS' COMPETITORS WOULD LEARN WHEN I SENT THEM JACK MULLAN'S HEAD.
BUT EVIDENTLY NOT.
OH, PLEASE.
KRAAK
AAAAGH!
KLUD
GURRGH
THERE IS ONLY ONE WORD FOR MEN WHO FAIL TO LEARN FROM THEIR MISTAKES...

IMBECILES!
ISN'T IT ENOUGH THAT I'M CONFINED HERE WITH YOU FOOLS IN THE FIRST PLACE? DO I HAVE TO DO EVERY SINGLE THING MYSELF?
NO, MADAME PROFESSOR, IT'S JUST THAT--
YOU GO BACK AND TELL ACADEMICIAN, FORMER ACADEMICIAN FILANOV, TO RUN THE SEQUENCER AGAIN AND MAIL ME THE RESULTS UP HERE. YOU TELL HIM IF--
--AND ONLY IF--I SEE THE SAME TRACE REPEATED ON EACH STRAND, MAYBE I'LL COME DOWN AND SEE ABOUT RE-CALCULATING THE SPLICE.
AND YOU TELL HIM IN THE FUTURE--
--NOT TO BE SUCH A BLOODY OLD WOMAN!

I'D HAVE THOUGHT BEING AN OLD WOMAN WAS PRETTY CLEARLY *MY* PREROGATIVE THESE DAYS.
COME ON IN, MY DEAR.
DON'T HESITATE ***FOREVER ON THE THRESHOLD.***
I'VE BEEN WATCHING YOUR PROGRESS ON THE ***MONITORS.*** IT WAS WISE OF YOU TO WAIT FOR ***NIGHTFALL.***
PERHAPS YOU'RE HUNGRY?
YOU...YOU ARE ***LYUDMILA KUDRIN?***
LYUDMILA ANTONOVNA KUDRIN, YES. ***FOR MY SINS.***
WHY, WHAT DID YOU ***EXPECT?***
THE WICKED WITCH OF THE EAST?

CHOOSE ONE. I WOULDN'T EXPECT YOU TO TRUST ME: A *WITCH* IN A *HIDDEN CAVE.* A *CRONE* WHO DRIPS *SLIME IN HER TRACKS.*
YOU'RE *FAMILIAR,* NO DOUBT, WITH THE RATHER *UNPLEASANT* JOKE ABOUT *WOMEN* AND *SNAILS?*
YES, I'VE *HEARD* IT ENOUGH TIMES.
SUCH HATRED IN THAT JOKE. SUCH *DISGUST.* SUCH A *FEAR OF FLUIDS...*
WELL, SUFFICE IT TO SAY I GENERATE *THIS* SLIME *ARTIFICIALLY.* IN THE LAB. I'M AFRAID *REGULAR IMMERSION* IS THE ONLY REMEDY FOR THE *RAVAGES* I'VE VISITED UPON MYSELF.
MY *SKIN* WON'T STAND UP WELL TO *STRONG LIGHT* OR *AIR THAT'S TOO DRY.* I HAVE TO *EAT AND DRINK* VERY CAREFULLY, TOO. I COUNT *EVERY CALORIE.*
YOU DID THIS TO *YOURSELF?*
WELL, LOOKING BACK, I THINK I WAS PERHAPS ENCOURAGED BY IRRESPONSIBLE MEN TO RISK THE DAMAGE. WE KNEW *SO LITTLE* IN THOSE DAYS, YOU SEE. THE *TECHNIQUES* WERE EXPERIMENTAL. BUT I WAS *VERY DETERMINED.* I PUSHED TO THE LIMITS.
BUT WHAT ABOUT *YOU,* MY DAUGHTER?
DAUGHTER??!!

OH, NOT *BIOLOGICALLY*, OF COURSE. YOU WERE ALL *ORPHANS*. THE PROJECT PARAMETERS REQUIRED IT. BUT *STILL*, IN A *WAY*...
WHAT IS YOUR *NAME?*
ROMANOVA.
NATALYA.
AH, *NATASHA*. YES, YOU WERE ALWAYS ONE OF THE *STRONGEST*. ONE OF THE *ANGRIEST*. I DON'T THINK YOU *EVER* FORGAVE YOUR PARENTS FOR DYING.
WHAT DID YOU PEOPLE DO TO ME?
BUT YOU MUST *KNOW* THAT, NATASHA, IF YOU'VE FOUND *THIS PLACE*. IF YOU'VE COME *THIS FAR*.

I KNOW ABOUT THE *MEMORY INDUCEMENT*, THE *HYPNOTIC BLOCKS* FROM THE *CONDITIONING*. NOT THE REST.
I DON'T KNOW WHY I'D NEED TO TAKE *THESE*.
MEDUSAGE
WELL, YOU *WOULDN'T*. IT'S A *SYSTEM SUPPRESSANT*. IT WEAKENS YOUR *REPAIR AND IMMUNE FUNCTIONS*. WHO ON EARTH GAVE IT TO YOU?
NO ONE *GAVE* IT TO ME. I GOT IT FROM *STEFANYA MELNIKOVA'S* PERSONAL EFFECTS. SHE WAS PREGNANT.
PREGNANT? STEFANYA'S *PREGNANT?*
NO, YOU STUPID OLD CRONE, STEFANYA'S NOT PREGNANT. STEFANYA'S *DEAD!*
TSH!

"IF...SHE WAS PREGNANT, SHE'D NEED TO. SHE'D HAVE TO. WE REWIRED YOU ALL BIOCHEMICALLY. GAVE YOU RAMPED UP IMMUNE AND CELL REPAIR SYSTEMS. ALL THE BLACK WIDOWS HAVE IT.
WHO KILLED HER, THE AMERICANS?
YEAH. I MEAN, NO. SHE...IT'S COMPLICATED.
LOOK, WHY WOULD SHE BE TAKING THIS STUFF?
"YOUR WOUNDS HEAL FOUR, MAYBE FIVE TIMES AS FAST AS A NORMAL HUMAN'S WOULD. YOU HARDLY GET SICK, YOU DON'T AGE AS FAST...
"...YOUR HAIR DOESN'T FALL OUT, YOUR SKIN CAN TAKE WIND AND SUN WITHOUT--"
LYUDMILA, WHAT THE HELL HAS THIS GOT TO DO WITH STEFANYA BEING PREGNANT?

"NATASHA, PREGNANCY IS AN *ILLNESS.* A *WEAKENING.* THE FETUS GROSSLY DISTORTS YOUR BODY'S FUNCTIONS AT A *PHYSICAL* AND A *BIOCHEMICAL* LEVEL. IT SUCKS AS MUCH *NOURISHMENT* FROM THE MOTHER AS IT POSSIBLY CAN.
"IT EVEN RUNS *HOSTILE BIOCHEMISTRY* THAT TRIES TO TURN YOU INTO A *DIABETIC,* TO FORCE UP YOUR *BLOOD SUGAR* BY SUPPRESSING *INSULIN* PRODUCTION."
THE SYSTEMS *WE* BUILT INTO YOU WILL RECOGNIZE ALL OF THIS *AS AN ATTACK,* AND *RESPOND ACCORDINGLY.*
YOU MEAN--
YES. *MISCARRIAGE.* AUTOMATIC, AS A FAIL-SAFE. NO BLACK WIDOW CAN EVER HAVE A CHILD.
"I'M *SORRY,* NATASHA, IT... THE BLACK WIDOW PROGRAM...WE WANTED *WARRIORS,* NOT *MOTHERS.*"

YOU WANTED...
WHAT GAVE YOU THE RIGHT TO DO THIS TO ME? TO ALL OF US?
AND DON'T TRY PATRIOTISM, 'CAUSE IT'S GOING TO GET YOU A SLAP. I'VE ALREADY HAD A BELLYFUL OF THAT FROM GRIGOR IVANOVICH.
GRIGOR IVA--?
HE'S HERE?
YEAH, I BROUGHT HIM WITH ME FROM MOSCOW. WHY?
NATASHA, OH LITTLE NATUSHKA. I ALWAYS KNEW, IN MY HEART I KNEW, THAT SOME OF YOU WOULD FIND YOUR WAY HOME.
YEAH? IS THAT WHY YOU'RE HAVING US ALL KILLED OFF, THEN?
WHAT?
YOU DON'T...
...YOU DON'T KNOW, DO YOU?

THIS IS *IMPOSSIBLE*...
NO, THIS IS HAPPENING.
STEFANYA MELNIKOVA WAS MURDERED BY RED ROOM ASSASSINS.
"I NEARLY ENDED UP THE SAME WAY MYSELF.
"AND FROM WHAT I SAW DOWN AT THE OLD SITE, I'M *NOT* THE FIRST BLACK WIDOW TO COME CALLING.
"I'M JUST THE *FIRST* NOT TO END UP AS *DOG MEAT.*"
VASSILY...
NOW WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU PEOPLE DOING OUT HERE?

NOTHING. OUR AGENTS IN THE U.S. HAVE ALREADY SOLD MOST OF THE BLACK WIDOW *BIOTECH* TO SOME CORPORATION THERE. THESE DAYS, WE JUST DO *JOY CHEMISTRY.* ANTI-DEPRESSANTS, MILD EUPHORICS. DRUGS TO MAKE PEOPLE BETTER WORKERS, HAPPIER CONSUMERS. *PAINKILLERS* FOR THE *SOUL.*
YOU CALL THAT NOTHING?
NATASHA, WHO *CARES?* THEY'RE *AMERICANS,* THEY'D DO IT TO THEMSELVES ANYWAY, WITHOUT *MY* HELP.
ALL THEY WANT IS TO CONSUME LIKE *PIGS* IN A *TROUGH,* TO WORK MINDLESSLY FOR THEIR *CORPORATE MASTERS* TWELVE HOURS A DAY, AND THEN SPEND THE REST OF THEIR TIME *SHOPPING.*
WHAT IS THIS, THE *OLD DAYS?* YOU'RE STILL SPOUTING THAT *PARTY-LINE* CRAP?
HAVE YOU EVER EVEN *BEEN* TO AMERICA, LYUDMILA? HAVE YOU EVER EVEN *MET* THESE PEOPLE THAT YOU HATE SO MUCH?
I DIDN'T HAVE TO! THEY CAME HERE! *THEY* CAME *HERE* WITH THEIR *CAPITALISM,* AND THEIR *MARKET FORCES,* AND THEY *DESTROYED* US, NATASHA. *THEY DESTROYED US!*
NO. WE DESTROYED OURSELVES. *WE DID IT OURSELVES.* ALL THEY DID WAS *HAND* US THE *GUN.*
THIS *STOPS. ALL* OF IT. *RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW.*
KLIKTHAK

KID, THERE IS JUST NO WAY YOU'D GET ME WEARING SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
BUT YOU SHOULD, YOU'VE GOT THE BUILD FOR--
KLIIIIING
KLIING
ALBUQUERQUE
OH GOOD, I'M STARVING.
YEAH, THAT WAS QUICK.
WHO IS IT?
DELIVERY FOR DEXTER. CHAR SIU CHOW MEIN, SZECHUAN CHICKEN, FRIED--
ALL RIGHT, HOLD ON.
S.W.A.T.
S.W.A.T.
AND A FREE ORDER OF SPARE RIBS. SMELLS GOOD.
STEP AWAY FROM THE DOOR.

GET OUT, KID! GET OUT THE BACK!
AAAAGH!!
BLAP BLAP BLAP
BLAM
BLAP BLAP BLAP BAP BLAP
AAAAIEEEGH!
NOOOOOOOOO!!
YOU SON OF A--
BLAM BLA
BLAM BLA

LAND
Ryan
J-Po

BLACK WIDOW (2004) #6
“NOW THAT’S WHAT I CALL A WOMAN (REPRISE)”

ALASKA
BBLIIIIP!! BLIIIIIIP!
HEY, THAT CAN'T BE RIGHT...
NOT A COMMERCIAL FLIGHT...
AT THAT SPEED, ARE YOU KIDDING?
--DOWN FROM THE POLE--
--NOT A MISSILE--
IT DOESN'T READ LIKE MILITARY TRAFF--
CODED PERSONNEL ONLY
IDENTIFY USING CODE FIRST
000000
1 2 3
4 5 6
7 8 9
--NOT LIKE ANYTHING I'VE EVER SEEN--

OREGON
...HAVE ENTERED U.S. AIRSPACE. IDENTIFY YOURSELF OR...
...I REPEAT, YOU HAVE THIRTY SECONDS TO COMPLY. THIS IS YOUR LAST--
THIS IS S.H.I.E.L.D. COMMAND, CAPTAIN. STAND DOWN. OUR INCOMING IS NOT HOSTILE, REPEAT, NOT HOSTILE.
PLEASE ESCORT HER IN TO LAND.

FURY. I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN.
LYUDMILA ANTONOVNA. IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME. I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE DEAD.
YOU WISHED, PERHAPS.
MMHM
YOU SMELL NICE, NICK. STILL USING THE SAME AFTERSHAVE?
UNTIL YOU DEVISE SOMETHING BETTER.
NATASHA, I'M AFRAID I HAVE SOME--
--I HAVE SOME VERY BAD NEWS.

HE TOOK THREE HITS. EXPLOSIVE SLUGS, TWO IN THE CHEST AND ONE THAT BLEW UP WHEN IT CREASED HIS SKULL. HE'S VERY LUCKY TO BE ALIVE.
S.H.I.E.L.D. WEST COAST COMMAND
WHO DID THIS?
WE'RE NOT SURE.
WHOEVER IT WAS, THEY MUST HAVE LEFT HIM FOR DEAD. SOMEHOW HE MANAGED TO CALL ONE OF OUR HOUSECLEANING SQUADS AND BLUFF THE CODES.
BY THE TIME THEY REALIZED DEXTER *ISN'T* ONE OF *OURS* ANYMORE, HE'D ALREADY BEEN FLOWN HERE AND CLEANED UP. WE COULD HARDLY UNPLUG HIM AGAIN.
WHY *NOT?* YOU CUT HIM LOOSE BEFORE.
AND I'M PRETTY SURE HE *DOESN'T* HAVE *HEALTH COVERAGE.*
THERE WAS A *GIRL* WITH HIM...
NOT ACCORDING TO MY TEAM'S REPORT. THEY CLEANED UP THE WHOLE PLACE. THERE WAS ONLY HIM.

THEN SOMEONE TOOK HER!
I KNOW YOU, FURY. YOU KNOW MORE THAN THIS.
WE THINK IT WAS NORTH.
NORTH?
I THOUGHT NORTH WAS JUST A PRIVATE-SECTOR FUNDING DREAM FOR THAT ENABLEMENT UNIT, BS-18.
TIMES HAVE CHANGED SINCE YOU LEFT US, NATASHA. BUSINESS SOLUTIONS 18 WENT AHEAD AND PRIVATIZED TWO YEARS AGO UNDER THE NAME NORTH. FULL ADMINISTRATION APPROVAL. THEY'VE RETAINED MOST OF THEIR INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY CONTACTS, BUT NONE OF THE OBLIGATIONS.
HOW INCONVENIENT FOR YOU. SO WHO DO THEY ANSWER TO?
TO NO ONE. THEY PULL N.S.A. FAVORS WHERE THEY CAN, BUT THE WORK IS CONTRACTED DIRECTLY TO THE CORPORATE SECTOR.
THEY ANSWER ONLY TO THEIR CLIENTS.
I'M SORRY, NATASHA.

EVERY TIME I TALK TO FURY I WANT TO BREAK HIS FACE. AND EVERY TIME I JUST LET HIM WALK AWAY.
YES, DEAR.
I'M AFRAID IT'S PHEROMONAL.
WHAT?
I'M SORRY, NATASHA. YET AGAIN, I AM TO BLAME.
"WHEN WE BEGAN THE BLACK WIDOW PROGRAM, YOU SEE, THERE WAS A GREAT DEAL OF OPPOSITION FROM, SHALL WE SAY, THE MORE CONSERVATIVE QUARTERS. MANY STILL FELT WOMEN HAD NO PLACE IN THE FRONT LINE."
THE THOUGHT OF A GENUINELY POWERFUL YOUNG WOMAN AS AN ACTIVE INDEPENDENT AGENT...WELL, YOU CAN IMAGINE THE REACTION.
A CONTROL SYSTEM WAS DEMANDED.

"WE DESIGNED A ***PHEROMONAL LOCK AND KEY***, A BIOCHEMICAL ***SCENT*** THAT COULD BE APPLIED LIKE PERFUME. BLACK WIDOW OPERATIVES WOULD BE ***INCAPABLE*** OF COMMITTING VIOLENCE, OR EVEN EXTENSIVE DISOBEDIENCE, AGAINST ***ANYONE*** WEARING THE SCENT. TO TRY WOULD BE LIKE ATTEMPTING TO HARM SOMEONE YOU CARED DEEPLY ABOUT, LIKE ***MURDERING A LOVED ONE.***
ПОБЕ
"AND THEN FURY STOLE IT FROM US."
CCCP
"HE USED IT TO ENGINEER YOUR DEFECTION TO S.H.I.E.L.D."
AND HE ***STILL*** USES IT NOW TO CONTROL YOUR REACTIONS.
H

DRING DRING
NATASHA?
WHAT DO YOU WANT, FURY?
LISTEN TO ME, NATASHA. I WOULD LIKE TO HELP, BUT MY HANDS ARE TIED.
YEAH? WHAT'S THE MATTER? THEY GOT AN AFTERSHAVE THAT LOCKS YOU UP, TOO?
THAT'S A SEPARATE MATTER, AND LYUDMILA HAD NO BUSINESS TELLING YOU.
DAMMIT, FURY, WHERE ARE THEY?
LISTEN TO ME, NATASHA. YOU MUST UNDERSTAND THAT I COULD FACE FEDERAL CHARGES FOR EVEN MENTIONING THE SANTA FE DOMINION TO YOU. ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME, NATASHA?

YEAH, I GOT IT.
417, NATASHA. 417.
KLIK
NEW MEXICO
I GOT EXTRA PEPPERONI JUST FOR YOU, BUT TO BE *COMPLETELY HONEST*--
417
GOOD IDEA. BE *COMPLETELY HONEST*...
...IF YOU WANT TO *LIVE*.

I WANT TO KNOW *WHERE YOU TOOK THE GIRL.* I WANT TO KNOW *WHO YOU'RE WORKING FOR,* AND I WANT TO KNOW *WHO SHOT PHIL DEXTER.*
SORRY, *CAN'T SAY.* I'D BE IN BREACH OF CONTRACT.
THAT'S UNFORTUNATE, BECAUSE *RITA* HERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE PART OF YOUR *CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS.*
YOU WON'T DO THAT. YOU'RE NOT CAPABLE OF--
KLIK!
YOU HAVE *NO IDEA* WHAT I'M CAPABLE OF.
ALL RIGHT, *ALL RIGHT.* JUST *DON'T HURT HER.* I'LL TELL YOU.

COME ON, KESTREL. SUPPOSED TO BE *OUT FRONT* BY NOW. IF YOU'RE STILL *CUDDLED UP* WITH THAT WAITRESS--
MAX HUNTER?
YE--
THGGG! THGGG!
PHIL DEXTER SAYS HI.
NYAAAAGH!
FFWHAAAAMP

WASHINGTON, D.C.
...FOLLOWING THE EXPLOSION, DISCOVERED TWO WOMEN BOUND AND GAGGED, SEMI-NAKED IN A HOTEL ROOM. IT'S NOT CLEAR...
THAT'S MY BLACK WIDOW.
MIAMI
I *PAID* YOU PEOPLE A RETAINER TO TRACK DOWN AND KILL A *SINGLE WOMAN* FOR ME. NOW HOW HARD CAN THAT BE?
INSTEAD, YOU SHOOT SOME *TRAILER-PARK TROLLOP* AND A *WASHED-UP PRIVATE EYE,* DELIVER THE GIRL TO *ME* BLEEDING TO DEATH INTERNALLY, AND YOU EXPECT ME TO BE *HAPPY* ABOUT YOUR INCOMPETENCE?
DEAR LORD, I MIGHT AS WELL HAVE HIRED THE *C.I.A...*
WELL, I DON'T SEE HOW YOU PROPOSE TO DO *THAT,* WITH ONE OF YOUR OPERATIVES *BARBECUED* AND THE OTHER DEAD CENTER IN A LESBIAN BONDAGE SCANDAL *WITH PHOTOS ON PAGE NINE!!!*

YOU SHOULD HAVE STAYED WITH *MY* PEOPLE, MR. McMASTERS.
NORTH ARE A GANG OF *SPOILED CHILDREN* WHOSE PARENTS HAVE BOUGHT THEM *TOO MANY TOYS.*
DON'T LECTURE ME, VASSILY. IT'S ENOUGH THAT I HAVE THE *CUTTING CORPORATION* SENDING COVERT KILLERS AFTER ME AND TRYING TO BUILD A HOSTILE TAKE-OVER OF GYNACON ON WALL STREET--
YOU *WORRY* TOO MUCH.
--AND *YOU* DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE *TALKING ABOUT. GYNACON* IS ABOUT TO PATENT A WHOLE RUN OF NEW *BIOCHEMICAL PROCESSES* AND *MOLECULAR CODES--*
--WHICH *2R* SUPPLIED YOU WITH.
YES, AND FOR WHICH 2R AND YOU *BOTH* HAVE BEEN *HANDSOMELY PAID.* LET'S *STICK TO THE POINT,* SHALL WE, SON?
I CANNOT AFFORD TO HAVE SOME *COLD WAR HANGOVER* RUNNING AROUND WITH THAT BIOTECH ALREADY PART OF HER *BASIC CELLULAR MAKEUP.*
WE'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT *SOME GENETICALLY MODIFIED CASH CROP* HERE OR *SOME THIRD-WORLD CHEMICALS ACCIDENT*--MY LAWYERS CAN HANDLE THAT STUFF IN THEIR *SLEEP.*
THIS IS A LIVING, BREATHING HUMAN BEING *RIGHT HERE* IN AMERICA WHO PREDATES OUR FILING PATENT BY *DECADES.*
DO YOU HAVE *ANY IDEA* WHAT THAT WOULD DO TO GYNACON'S *STOCK?*

I'M *NOT UNAWARE* OF HOW MARKET FORCES WORK.
SON, YOU MAY BE WAY PAST LETHAL IN WHAT YOU DO, BUT WHERE *CAPITAL* IS CONCERNED, YOU ARE A *BABY.*
WITHOUT *ME,* YOU'D HAVE--
WHERE *IS* EVERYONE ALL OF A SUDDEN?
I GAVE YOUR CREW AND SECURITY THE NIGHT OFF.
WELL, *THAT* WAS KIND OF YOU.
WHY, MAY I ASK?
BECAUSE TONIGHT I'M GOING TO SOLVE *ALL* YOUR *PROBLEMS.*

LISTEN--
NO, YOU LISTEN.
DRIP DRIP DRIP
DRIB DRIB DRIB DRIP
YOU HEAR THAT?
WHY DON'T YOU COME OUT NOW, NATASHA?
MR. MCMASTERS, ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE *NATALYA ROMANOVA*, THE LAST REMAINING *BLACK WIDOW*.

I AM VASSILY ILYICH ULYANOV.
NO RELATION, I ASSURE YOU.
AND THIS--
--IS MR. IAN McMASTERS, THE MAJORITY SHAREHOLDER AND CEO OF GYNACON.
WHO I AM SURE YOU'VE COME TO KILL. UNFORTUNATELY, TO DO THAT--
--YOU WILL HAVE TO COME THROUGH ME.
SO. SHALL WE GET ON WITH IT?

I CAN SMELL IT ON HIM. JUST LIKE FURY.
OH, WELL.
TOO MUCH TO HOPE THAT HE WOULDN'T HAVE ACCESS TO THE MAGIC POTION BY NOW.
IT'S NOT A *PERCEPTIBLE SCENT*, BUT IT'S THERE--THE *BIOCHEMICAL WHISPER* OF MY OWN *SUBMISSION.*
YOU'RE GOING TO DIE, BLACK WIDOW.
HIS *CONFIDENCE* IS WELL-PLACED. I CAN'T DO THIS.
THE *PROGRAMMING* I'VE HAD *SINCE I WAS A CHILD* WON'T LET ME.
I THINK OF *GOUGING HIS EYE* OR *RIPPING OPEN HIS THROAT WITH THE BLADE OF MY HAND*--AND I FEEL *SICK.*
HAH!!!
IT'S *ALL I CAN DO* TO SHIELD MYSELF AGAINST HIS BLOWS.

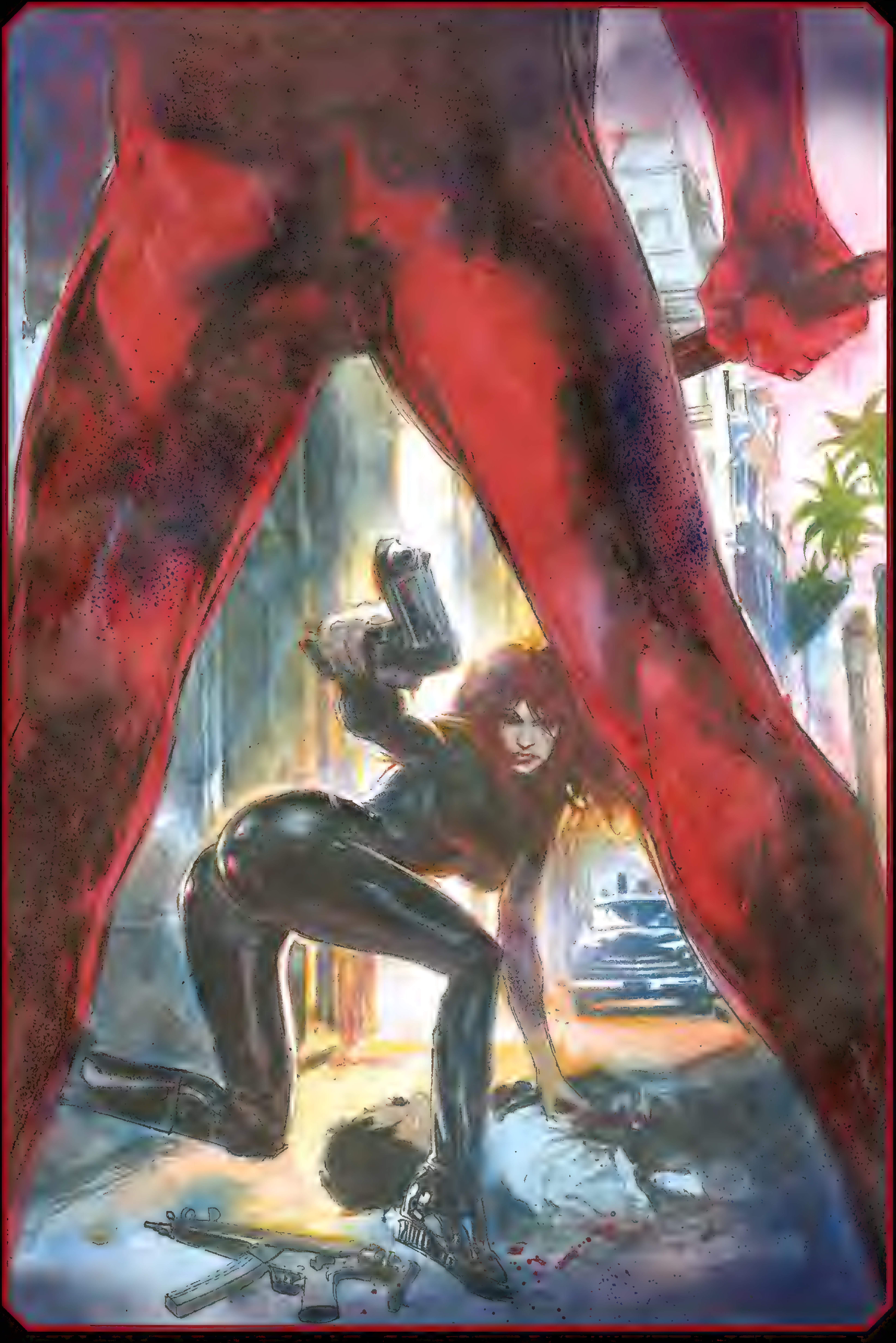
HAI!
UNNGH!
I FEEL SLOW, STUPID.
I START TO UNDERSTAND HOW IT MUST FEEL TO BE A BATTERED WIFE.
HAAHH!
NNNNFFF
I TASTE BLOOD...
HEH!
GUUUUUUGH!!
ANGER AND WILL, PRIDE AND SELF, THE REFLEX OF AGGRESSION--ALL WITHER AWAY INSIDE ME. I JUST WANT HIM TO STOP.

DOWN SO SOON, BLACK WIDOW?
MORE BLOOD IN MY THROAT...KEEP IT THERE, DON'T SWALLOW IT...
PLEASE, ISN'T THIS ENOUGH...?
ALL I HAVE LEFT IS ENDURANCE.
KRUGG!
NURRGH!!!
AH...
...THAT'S BETTER
YOU BROKE MY NOSE, VASSILY.

I CAN'T SMELL ANYTHING ANYMORE.
AAAAIIIIIIIIIII....!
HNNNHUH!
KRAK!
GUUURGH!

KI-YAAII!!!
KLUMP!
LOOK, YOU CAN'T--

--YOU CAN'T KILL ME. YOU THINK I'M THE ONLY ONE? I'M JUST ONE PART OF A GLOBAL SYSTEM. THEY'LL COME AFTER YOU, THEY'LL HUNT YOU DOWN--
ONE CHANCE. WHERE'S THE GIRL?
THE GIRL? SHE'S GONE, VASSILY'S MEN TOOK HER.
TOOK HER WHERE?
I DON'T-I DON'T KNOW. LOOK, IT'S NOT MY FAULT. SHE WAS BLEEDING INSIDE WHEN SHE GOT HERE. I DIDN'T WANT... SHE JUST GOT IN THE WAY...
YOU CAN'T...
NOOOOOOOOOOOO
SO THAT'S IT. IN THE END, THAT'S ALL IT WAS.
THE SOVIET UNION'S FINEST TURNED PILL PEDDLERS AND TRAVELING SALESMEN, ONE FACELESS BILLIONAIRE AMONG A SYSTEM OF HUNDREDS, TRYING TO PROTECT HIS INVESTMENT...AND A YOUNG GIRL SOMEWHERE BLEEDING OUT HER LIFE TO PAY FOR IT ALL.
McMASTERS WAS RIGHT. THEY WILL COME AFTER ME FOR THIS.
LET THEM.
END



BLACK WIDOW (2005) #1

"THE THINGS THEY SAY ABOUT HER"

TEXAS
YOUR PA WAS A GOOD MAN, JASON.
DON'T LET NO ONE TELL YOU DIFFERENT.
JAY WILLIAMS
1962 – 2004
LOVING HUSBAND,
DEVOTED FATHER
COME HOME FROM
THE ROAD TO REST
MAYBE HE WASN'T ALWAYS RIGHT WITH THE LAW, BUT HE HAD A CODE OF HIS OWN.
I KNOWN HIM SINCE FOLSOM AND I AIN'T NEVER SEEN HIM BACK DOWN OR SELL OUT A FRIEND.
AN' MAYBE HE DIDN'T LEAVE YOU MUCH--
HE DIDN'T LEAVE ME NOTHING, MIKEY!

THE BANK GOT THE HOUSE, THEY PUT ME AND MOM IN THE STREET COS HE QUIT PAYING LAST YEAR.
EVEN THE TRUCK I GOT TO SELL TO MAKE GOOD ON WHAT HE OWED TEAGUE McASKIN.
WE GOT NOTHING LEFT.
AIN'T YOUR PA'S FAULT, JASON. HE WOULD HAVE PAID McASKIN OUT THIS LAST HAUL IF THAT RUSSIAN WHORE HADN'T--
HADN'T...
YOU GOT TO FIND HER, JASON, WHEREVER SHE IS. YOU GOT TO MAKE HER PAY FOR WHAT SHE DONE...
DONE TO US BOTH.

WASHINGTON, DC
WHAT COLONEL FURY DOESN'T SEEM TO *APPRECIATE* IS THAT ACTIONS HAVE *CONSEQUENCES.*
AND THAT APPLIES AS MUCH TO HIS, AHH, MORE *IRREGULAR* TROOPS AS IT DOES TO ANY *OTHER* BRANCH OF OUR ARMED SERVICES. TO ALLOW THIS WOMAN, THIS *MURDEROUS HARPY* TO *RAMPAGE--*
NATALYA ROMANOVA IS *RETIRED*, SIR. I HAVE NO MORE INFLUENCE OVER HER ACTIONS THAN MR. HOLGATE HERE.
YES. AND *YET* SHE WAS ABLE TO SOMEHOW ZERO IN ON OUR OPERATIVES IN ARIZONA--
SHE *IS* A REMARKABLE WOMAN.
--*TORTURE* ONE, *MURDER* THE OTHER, ESCAPE TO MIAMI AND THERE ASSASSINATE A *VALUED MEMBER* OF AMERICA'S *CORPORATE COMMUNITY*, THEN *DISAPPEAR WITHOUT A TRACE.*
YOU'LL *FORGIVE* ME, COLONEL, IF I BEGIN TO QUESTION THE *CURRENT MANAGEMENT* OF S.H.I.E.L.D. AND ITS CIRCUS OF *MASKS* AND *CAPES.*
ARE WE ABOUT *DONE* HERE, SIR?
NO, WE'RE *NOT DONE*, COLONEL.
SIT DOWN.

I'LL CATCH UP WITH YOU AT *DINNER*, ALEX.
I'D LIKE A FEW MOMENTS ***ALONE*** WITH COLONEL FURY, IF YOU DON'T MIND.
IT'S ***NO SECRET*** YOU DON'T LIKE ME, COLONEL. EVER SINCE I WAS ***ELECTED--***
YOU ***WEREN'T*** ELECTED...
...SIR.
HOW *DARE--*
YOU ***CHEATED*** AND ***LIED*** AND ***BOUGHT*** YOUR WAY INTO POWER AND THAT'S HOW YOU'VE *STAYED* THERE.
AND YOU'RE ***RIGHT***, I ***DON'T*** LIKE YOU.
BUT ***UNFORTUNATELY***, THE MEN AND WOMEN I MANAGE HAVE A SENTIMENTAL ATTACHMENT TO ***POLITICAL PAGEANTRY.***

LA HAVANA
50 AÑOS
UCHAMOS POR EL FUTUR
VIVA FIDEL
LA VICTORIA
WELL, WELL...
NICE TO SEE ANOTHER DINOSAUR STILL STANDING.

BUT THAT'S NOT WHO I'M HERE TO SEE.
FIGURES I'D HAVE TO *WAIT*.
SHE'S AN IMPORTANT PERSON THESE DAYS.
CAN'T EXPECT HER TO JUST *DROP EVERYTHING*.
FORTUNATELY, WITH A FACE LIKE THIS, THE *SEX TOURISTS* ARE GOING TO LEAVE ME ALONE.
FORTUNATELY FOR *THEM*.
SHAME THE SAME CAN'T BE SAID FOR *LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT*.
I HAD HOPED TO *AVOID* THIS.

¿QUE HACE AQUI SOLITA, JINETERA?
I LEFT MIAMI IN A HURRY. I DON'T HAVE PAPERS OR ID.
MY VISA'S A STOLEN MOTOR LAUNCH, ABANDONED ON A BEACH WEST OF HERE. AND THE FEW DOLLARS IN MY POCKET AREN'T GOING TO BE ENOUGH TO BUY THESE GUYS.
¡VAMOS, MAMITA!
WHICH LEAVES ONLY ONE OBVIOUS SOLUTION.
KRAK
KRUG
THEY'RE REALLY NOT VERY GOOD.
GURGH
BUT THEN AGAIN, THEY DON'T HAVE TO BE.
KLIK
KLIK
¡AL SUELO, PUTA!
¡AL SUELO!!
THEY HAVE GUNS.

¡BASTA YA! ¡IDIOTAS!
HOW DARE YOU!
THIS WOMAN IS AN HONORED GUEST OF THE CUBAN STATE.
AND A CLOSE PERSONAL FRIEND.
STILL LOVE TO EXAGGERATE, DON'T YOU, YELENA.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN? THE HONORED GUEST LINE? OR THE CLOSE PERSONAL FRIEND?
BOTH, I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT.
AH, BUT THAT'S WHERE YOU'D BE WRONG. OR AT LEAST PREMATURE.
I MAKE ONE OR TWO PHONE CALLS TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE--
--AND YOU WILL BE AN HONORED GUEST OF THE CUBAN STATE.
ABOUT BEING A CLOSE PERSONAL FRIEND, WELL THAT REMAINS TO BE SEEN.
NASDROVYA!
KLINK

THING IS, NATASHA, YOU'VE NEVER KNOWN HOW TO HANDLE MEN RIGHT.
YOU'VE GOT TO LEARN TO PLAY THEM. LIKE WITH A BIG FISH.
THEY NEED TO FEEL IMPORTANT, LIKE THEY'RE IN CONTROL. YOU MUST NEVER CHALLENGE THAT.
YOU JUST FIND OTHER WAYS TO GET 'ROUND THEM.
I DON'T LIKE GAMES, 'LENA. I NEVER HAVE. AND I'M TIRED OF DEPLOYING MY BODY TO GET WHAT I WANT.
THEN, MY DEAR, TO QUOTE DOCTOR JOHNSON, YOU ARE TIRED OF LIFE.
LIFE AS A WOMAN, ANYWAY.
GUESS I SHOULD JUST LEARN FROM YOU, HUH?
WELL, YOU COULD DO WORSE, NATASHA.
CONSIDER THE EVIDENCE...

YOU'RE NEARLY FORTY.
YOU LIVE ALONE IN A SHOTGUN SHACK IN THE ARIZONA DESERT.
AND RIGHT NOW YOU MUST BE THE ONLY HUMAN BEING ON THE PLANET TRYING TO SMUGGLE HERSELF OUT OF MIAMI AND INTO CUBA, LOOKING FOR POLITICAL ASYLUM.
I MEAN, TALK ABOUT SWIMMING AGAINST THE CURRENT!
WHEREAS YOU--
WHEREAS I'M NOT YET THIRTY, I HAVE MODELING CONTRACTS WORTH MILLIONS. I OWN A LINGERIE EMPIRE THAT TURNS OVER HALF A MILLION DOLLARS A MONTH, A COUPLE OF SOFT PORN CABLE CHANNELS IN MOSCOW, HOUSES IN SIX DIFFERENT COUNTRIES...
YES, YOU'VE DONE WELL FOR YOURSELF, 'LENA.
AND IT ALWAYS WAS ABOUT THAT WITH YOU, WASN'T IT. YOURSELF.
WELL, I TRIED MY HAND AT SACRIFICE FOR THE MOTHERLAND ONCE OR TWICE, BUT YOU'RE RIGHT. IT WAS NEVER REALLY ME.
WE USED TO COMPETE, NATASHA. BUT THAT WAS BEFORE I REALIZED WE WANTED COMPLETELY DIFFERENT THINGS OUT OF LIFE.
I GOT WHAT I WANTED.
DID YOU?

NEW YORK
GUURRRGH
IT'S NOT A QUESTION OF WHAT WE *WANT*, MATT. I'VE GOT *NO ROOM TO MANEUVER* HERE.

AS OF *TOMORROW*, NATALYA ROMANOVA TOPS AMERICA'S *MOST WANTED LIST*. BY *DIRECT PRESIDENTIAL DECREE*.
THAT'S *INSANE*.
THINK SO? WELL, GET USED TO THE INSANITY, BECAUSE IT'S THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME AROUND HERE.
SHE MURDERED THE CEO OF GYNACON, MATT. THE THIRD RICHEST MAN IN MIAMI, GOLFING BUDDY TO ALEXANDER HOLGATE AND A PAID-UP SUBSCRIBER FOR NORTH'S SERVICES.
WHAT DID YOU EXPECT? SHE'D GET A *MEDAL?*
NATASHA'S A *FRIEND*, FURY. DON'T TELL ME WE HAVE TO SIT STILL FOR THIS.
YOU PERSONALLY, MATT? MAYBE *YOU* DON'T.
BUT *S.H.I.E.L.D.* IS ALREADY UNDER MASSIVE PRESSURE TO GET WITH THE PROGRAM. I TAKE A STAND ON THIS AND I'M *HISTORY*. AND *THEN* YOU'LL BE TAKING ORDERS FROM *HOLGATE*, WHICH MEANS THE ONLY *CRIME FIGHTING* YOU'LL GET TO DO IS *BUSTING GREENPEACE ACTIVISTS* WHENEVER THEY UPSET ONE OF NORTH'S CLIENTS.
SOUND APPEALING?
I DIDN'T THINK SO.

BUT WE RETURN *ONCE AGAIN* TO THIS IMAGE OF YOUR *MOTHER,* MARTIN. DO YOU NOT THINK--
NO!!!
YOU LEAVE MY MOTHER *OUT OF THIS.* THE ONLY THING *WRONG* WITH ME IS WHAT THAT *RUSSIAN WHORE* INJECTED ME WITH. IT'S NOT--
IT'S NOT...
NOT...
NNNMMUUUHH....
SSSSKLFFF
MARTIN?
NNNAA NANANAMOOO MMMMY...
MARTIN!

MARTIN, I CAN'T HELP YOU UNTIL YOU WANT ME TO.
S-S-SURE YOU CAN, DOC. JUST GIVE ME A M-M-M-MONTH'S SUPPLY OF WHAT YOU JUST HIT ME WITH THERE.
WHAT I GAVE YOU WAS A SIMPLE TRANQUILIZER. IT ISN'T A SOLUTION. THESE ANXIETY ATTACKS--
YEAH, YEAH. "THE DRUG DOESN'T CAUSE THE DISORDER, IT JUST OPENS THE DOOR TO AN EXISTING PERSONALITY FLAW."
GET CHEMICALLY INTERROGATED BY THE KGB'S FINEST, THEN COME BACK AND TELL ME THAT.
MR. FERRIS, YOU ARE AWARE THAT I CANNOT RECOMMEND YOU FOR A RETURN TO DUTY UNTIL THESE EPISODES--
YEAH. TELL ME SOMETHING I DON'T KNOW.
MARTIN FERRIS?
MY NAME IS KESTREL. I HAVE A PROPOSITION FOR YOU.

INTERESTED?
WELL, I'M *LISTENING,* YES...
KLUD KLUD
...AND TRYING NOT TO THINK ABOUT GYNACON, SALLY ANNE OR PHIL.
SEE, THOSE IDIOTS WHO TRIED TO ARREST YOU LAST WEEK ARE INDICATIVE OF A *TREND.*
A.I.D.S. IS ON THE RISE IN CUBA. THE *SEX TOURISTS* ARE BRINGING IT IN *WHOLESALE.* THE POLICE HAVE ORDERS TO CRACK DOWN ON *PROSTITUTION,* AND, OF COURSE, AS PER DREARILY USUAL IT'S THE *GIRLS, NOT* THE CLIENTS, WHO PAY THE PRICE.
PLUS CA CHANGE...
THUGGGG
VIVA LA REVOLUCION SOCIALISTA, EH?
WELL, *QUITE.*
KLUD
AND YOU DON'T HAVE THE INFLUENCE TO--
SADLY NOT. BUT I *HAVE* BEEN CHIPPING AWAY AT THE PROBLEM *IN OTHER WAYS.* SOME OF THE GIRLS DO *LINGERIE MODELING* FOR ME. COMPARED TO *U.S. AGENCY RATES,* THEY COME *DIRT CHEAP,* BUT IT'S STILL A FORTUNE TO THEM, AND IT GETS THEM OFF THE STREET.
FOR THOSE I *CAN'T* GET OFF THE STREET, I'VE ALSO BEEN BRINGING IN *MEDICAL SUPPLIES,* HANDING THEM OUT *FREE* THROUGH THE GIRLS I KNOW.
YOU KNOW *THE OLD JOKE.* IN CUBA, ONE DOCTOR FOR *EVERY HUNDRED CITIZENS--*

--AND ONE ASPIRIN FOR EVERY THOUSAND. YES.
EXACTLY. AND NEEDLESS TO SAY THE SITUATION IS NO BETTER FOR STATE-OF-THE ART ANTI-VIRALS. WITH THE EMBARGO, I HAVE TO GO TO THE BLACK MARKET FOR BOTH SUPPLY AND DELIVERY.
AND THIS IS WHERE I HAVE A PROBLEM.
RECENTLY, MY FLORIDA SUPPLIERS ARE GETTING STICKY.
I SEE.
AND YOU'D LIKE ME TO UNSTICK THEM?
WELL, YOU ALWAYS WERE BETTER AT THIS SUPER HERO STUFF THAN ME.
I'D GO MYSELF, BUT IT'S YEARS SINCE I EVEN FIRED A GUN, LET ALONE SHOT ANYONE. THE ONLY MARTIAL ARTS I PRACTICE THESE DAYS ARE T'AI CHI AND BOXERCISE. AND, WELL, I CAN'T REALLY AFFORD TO BE CAUGHT STEALING DRUGS FROM A FLORIDA WAREHOUSE, CAN I?
OH, AND I CAN?
BUT THAT'S THE POINT, NATASHA.
YOU WON'T GET CAUGHT.

OFF THE FLORIDA COAST
WELL, SHE IS PUTTING ME UP FREE OF CHARGE. AND SHE DID GET THE CUBAN POLICE AND IMMIGRATION OFF MY BACK.
CALL IT A FAVOR RETURNED.
AND SOMETHING TO STOP ME THINKING ABOUT THINGS I CAN'T CHANGE RIGHT NOW.
THESE GUYS 'LENA'S LENT ME ARE LOCAL TALENT, CUBAN SPECIAL FORCES. THEY'RE DYING FOR THE CHANCE OF SOME COVERT ACTION AGAINST THE IMPERIALIST USA.
THEY DON'T SEEM TO HAVE REALIZED THEY'LL BE FIGHTING THEIR OWN COUNTRYMEN--CUBAN EXILES WITH MAFIA CONNECTIONS OUT OF MIAMI AND TAMPA.
HEY!!!
LIFE'S JUST NEVER AS SIMPLE AS YOU'D LIKE IT TO BE.

DEATH, ON THE OTHER HAND, DOESN'T TAKE MUCH FIGURING OUT.
KGGHHHURGH!
MUST BE WHY MEN LIKE IT SO MUCH.
THIS REALLY WAS A LOUSY MOVIE, MAN. YOU CAN SEE WHY THE GUY WENT INTO POLITICS.
BLAKA-BLAKA-BLAKA-BLAKA
AAAAGH
NOBODY MOVES, NOBODY DIES.
THAT'S MY BEST OFFER, GENTLEMEN.

DO YOU HAVE *ANY IDEA* WHO YOU'RE DEALING WITH HERE?
I THINK SO. *CHEAP ORGANIZED CRIME* AND A BUNCH OF *EMBITTERED IDIOTS* WHO THINK *FULGENCIO BATISTA* WAS A *HERO.*
NOW YELENA BELOVA WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHAT YOU'VE DONE WITH HER DRUGS.
WHAT CAN I SAY, BEAUTIFUL? PRICES AROUND HERE *WENT UP.* THAT RUSSIAN BABE DON'T WANT TO *PAY,* SHE AIN'T GONNA *GET.*
THAT'S WHERE YOU'RE WRONG. SHE *IS* GOING TO GET.
AND PRICES AROUND HERE JUST HIT *AN ALL-TIME LOW.*
WE'RE GOING TO *TAKE WHAT'S OWED,* PLUS A *TWO HUNDRED PERCENT SURCHARGE* BECAUSE WE HAD TO COME AND GET IT OURSELVES. AND YOU SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT IF DELIVERIES DON'T *RESUME AT NORMAL PRICES* BY THE END OF THIS MONTH, I'LL BE COMING BACK HERE *TO BURN THIS PLACE TO THE GROUND.*
WITH *YOU* STILL INSIDE IT.
NOW THAT'S A TACTIC YOU *MAFIA GUYS* UNDERSTAND, RIGHT?

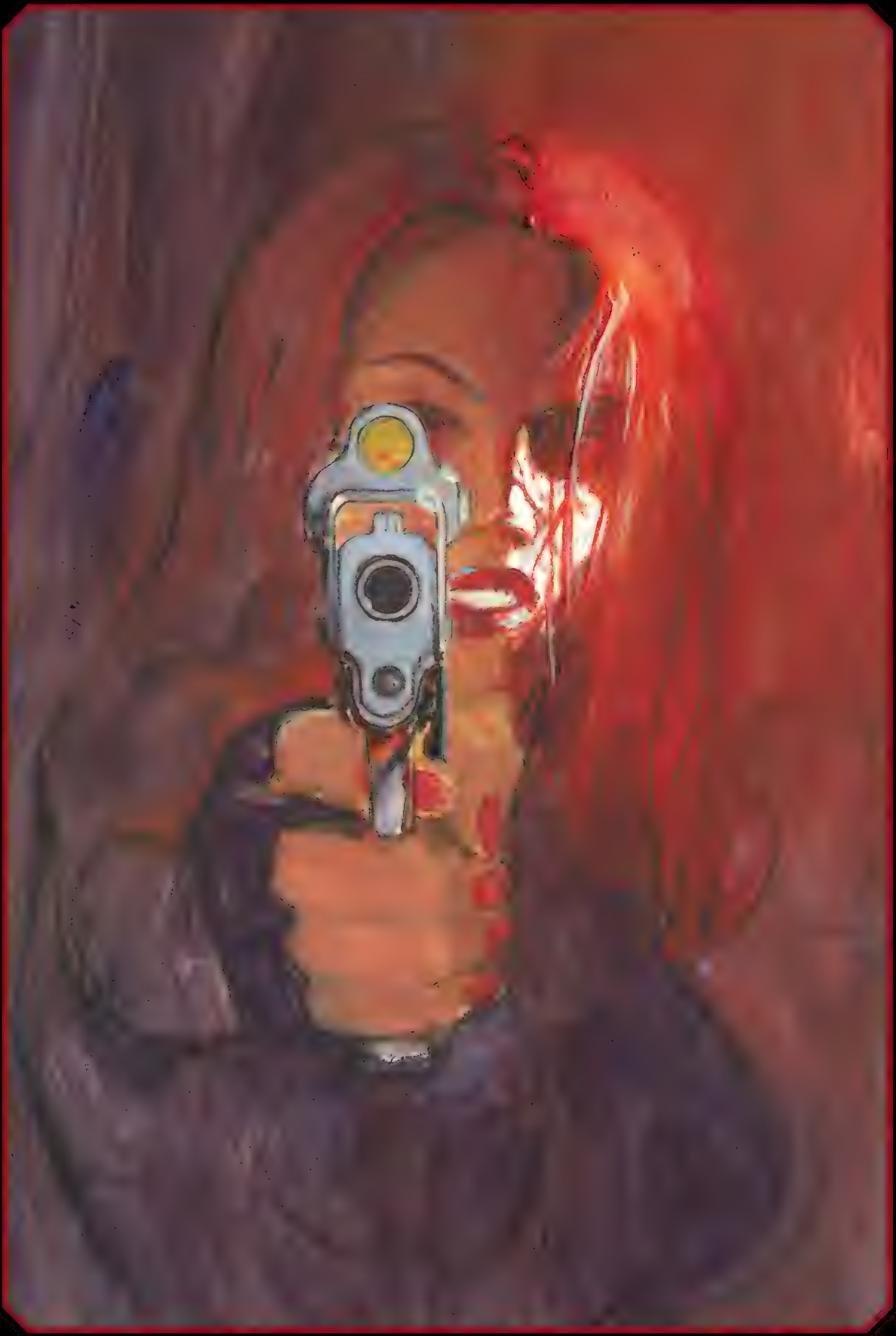
WE'RE *ALL DONE.* FIVE MORE MINUTES TO LOAD ONTO THE TRUCK OUT THERE, HOTWIRE IT AND WE'RE OUT OF HERE.
GOOD, I'M COMING DOWN.
SO LONG, BOYS. I GUESS SOMEONE'LL COME BY WHEN YOU DON'T ANSWER THE PHONES TOMORROW MORN--
GEN
WHERE'D YOU GET *THIS* STUFF FROM?
GO--
MEDUSAGEN GYNACON PACKED FOR TROPICAL STORAGE DO NOT BREAK SE
I WON'T ASK YOU NICELY AGAIN.

ALRIGHT, *ALRIGHT.* I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY. IT'S ALL STUFF TO SHIP OUT NEXT WEEK.
LOOK, I CAN ACCESS THE MANIFEST FROM THE COMPUTER THERE. LET ME DO THAT, AND I CAN TELL YOU, ALRIGHT?
JUST *PUT THE KNIFE AWAY,* HUH?
CHEF-CHEF-CHIT-CHIT-CHIT-CHIT-
YEAH, SEE IT'S COMING UP. THEY GOT IT FROM SOME PLACE NEAR *MIAMI BEACH. PRIVATE ADDRESS,* LOOKS LIKE, BUT--

ONLY THE DAMNED PRINTER, BEAUTIFUL.
HAHAHAHAHA!
CHEE-CHEE-CHIT-CHIT-CHIT-CHIT
TCHGGK
BLA-BLA-BLA-BLA-BLA-BLA-BLA-BLAPPP!!!
STUPID. STUPID. STUPID.
WE COULD ALL HAVE WALKED AWAY FROM THIS ALIVE, YOU STUPID--
BUT NO. WE HAD TO DO THE MAN THING.

ARE YOU--
I'M FINE.
BUT YELENA'S GOING TO HAVE TO PHONE IN HER COMPLAINT. WE'RE ALL OUT OF MESSENGER BOYS.
LET'S JUST GET OUT OF HERE.
TELL YELENA NOT TO WORRY. I'LL BE BACK IN A FEW DAYS. THERE'S SOMETHING I NEED TO DO HERE FIRST.
BUT THE AMERICANS--
YEAH, THEY'LL STILL BE LOOKING FOR ME.
BUT IT'S A BIG COUNTRY, AND THEY'LL FIGURE I'D HAVE TO BE COMPLETELY CRAZY TO STILL BE HANGING AROUND IN THE MIAMI AREA.
AND WHO KNOWS--MAYBE THEY'RE RIGHT.

MIAMI
I STILL DON'T THINK THERE'S *ANY* POINT IN THIS.
NO?
WELL THE THING IS, MARTIN--
NORTH PAYS *ME* TO DO THE THINKING, NOT YOU. SO HOW ABOUT YOU JUST BE *GRATEFUL* I GOT YOU THIS GIG AND CONCENTRATE ON *BACKING ME UP?*
LOOK, THIS WOMAN'S A *TERRORIST*, A *PROFESSIONAL MURDERER.* SHE'D HAVE TO BE *INSANE* TO STILL BE HANGING AROUND THIS CLOSE TO THE HIT.
YES, INSANE--
"OR JUST VERY, *VERY* DETERMINED."



BLACK WIDOW (2005) #2

"WHAT DO YOU REALLY DEEP DOWN WANT?"

MIAMI BEACH, TWO WEEKS AGO.
NICE...
YOU THINK YOU COULD HAVE MESSED HER UP A LITTLE MORE?
I THINK THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT ME.
YOU COWBOYS EVER HEAR OF THE HAGUE CONVENTION?
I THINK...THEY SHOT ME...I CAN'T REMEMBER...
YOU KNOW, BIG INTERNATIONAL TREATY. SAYS YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO SHOOT PEOPLE WITH BULLETS LIKE THIS.
ESPECIALLY NOT CHILDREN.
KLINK
WHAT'S HE TALKING ABOUT? I'M ALMOST SIXTEEN!
I GUESS GUYS LIKE YOU, YOU'RE NOT BIG INTO INTERNATIONAL LAW, HUH?
JUST SHUT UP AND DO YOUR JOB, DOC.
I HAVE DONE MY JOB. DESPITE YOUR IDIOT THUGS' BEST EFFORTS, SHE'S GOING TO LIVE.
NOW SUPPOSE YOU PAY ME AND GET THIS MESS OUT OF MY HOUSE.

COLD, HARD CASH, EH. THE HELL WITH HILLARY CLINTON, I LIKE THE HEALTH SERVICE JUST THE WAY IT IS.
SO WHERE YOU TAKING HER?
DON'T BE SILLY, DOC. I TELL YOU THAT, I'D HAVE TO TAKE YOU THERE AS WELL.
YOU JUST GO BACK INSIDE, CLEAN UP, POUR YOURSELF A DRINK AND FORGET YOU EVER SAW HER.
GOT IT?
GOT IT.
YOUR HEALTH, KID.
WHOEVER YOU WERE.

SKAK
Maker's Mark
--ND IN **BREAKING FINANCIAL NEWS**, MIAMI-BASED COSMETICS GIANT **GYNACON** FINALLY SUCCUMBS TO HOSTILE TAKEOVER BY THE **CUTTING CORPORATION**. SHAREHOLDERS AGREED EARLIER TODAY TO--

--THAT GYNACON'S SHARE PRICE HAS BEEN IN **VIRTUAL FREEFALL** FOR NEARLY TWO WEEKS NOW, SINCE THE **DEATH UNDER MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES** OF THE COMPANY'S FOUNDER AND CEO, **IAN McMASTERS.** A SPOKESMAN--
--FOR THE CUTTING CORPORATION SAID HE HOPED THAT THE MERGER WOULD BRING **NEW STABILITY** TO--
KLIK
YOU *DROPPED THIS*, DOCTOR. AND TO BE HONEST, IT LOOKS TO ME LIKE YOU'VE HAD *ENOUGH TV FOR ONE NIGHT.*
JEEZUS, DON'T YOU PEOPLE *EVER KNOCK?*
WHAT DO YOU WANT *THIS* TIME?
THIS TIME?
NOT QUITE THE REACTION I WAS LOOKING FOR. SEEMS THE GOOD DOCTOR HERE HAS ME DOWN AS ONE OF HIS IFFY ASSOCIATES.

PLAY IT ANYWAY.
THIS TIME, DOCTOR, IT'S THE *MEDUSAGEN.*
YEAH. *GYNACON STOCK,* WENT OUT A WEEK AGO WITH ALL THE OTHER STUFF. WHAT ABOUT IT?
WHERE'S IT GOING?
WELL, HOW THE HELL SHOULD I KNOW? I JUST HELD IT FOR YOU GUYS, 'TIL THEY CAME TO COLLECT. SAME AS ALWAYS. MAN, DIDN'T THEY *BRIEF* YOU ON THIS?
NO, THEY DIDN'T.
MAN, THIS IS *TYPICAL.* YOU PEOPLE ARE *SO...*
THIS IS JUST LIKE THAT *GIRL* YOU SENT ME LAST MONTH, *OUT OF THE BLUE, BLEEDING TO DEATH.* OH JUST PATCH HER UP, DOC, SURE, JUST--
WHAT DID YOU SAY?

THE GIRL, YOU KNOW, THE GUNSHOT CASE. GOD, WHAT ARE YOU, IDIOT RECRUIT OF THE WEEK? DIDN'T THEY TELL YOU ANYTH--
NOW, YOU LISTEN TO ME VERY CAREFULLY.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, BUT I INTEND TO FIND OUT. I WANT TO KNOW ALL ABOUT THIS GIRL, WHO BROUGHT HER HERE, WHAT STATE SHE WAS IN, WHAT YOU DID TO HER AND WHERE SHE IS NOW.
DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?
YOU...
YOU'RE NOT WITH BOBBY'S GUYS AT ALL, ARE YOU?
NO, I'M NOT, BUT DON'T LET THAT WORRY YOU. YOU MAKE MY LIFE DIFFICULT HERE, YOU'LL FIND I'M EVERY BIT AS UNPLEASANT AS YOUR USUAL PLAYMATES.
IF IT HELPS, JUST THINK OF ME AS ANOTHER ONE OF THE BAD GUYS.
BECAUSE, BASICALLY, THAT'S WHAT I AM.

HE TALKS.
THE *ALCOHOL* AND WHATEVER *HURT* HE'S CARRYING INSIDE DON'T MAKE FOR MUCH RESISTANCE.
I THINK THERE'S A PART OF HIM THAT *NEEDS* TO GET IT ALL OUT. MOST OF IT'S MORE A *CONFESSIONAL* THAN ANYTHING.
THE WOMAN AND CHILD IN THE HALL PHOTO ARE *FIVE YEARS DEAD* IN A PLANE CRASH, AND HE HASN'T *COPED* WELL. THE HOUSE IS *MORTGAGED TO THE HILT* TO COVER FEES ON A *MALPRACTICE SUIT* HE'S FIGHTING AND PROBABLY DESERVES TO LOSE. HE'S GOT A *HIGH STAKES GAMBLING PROBLEM* TO GO WITH *THE DRINK*, AND SOME DUBIOUS FRIENDS AS A RESULT.
Maker's MARK
BUT OUT OF THIS MESS, I TAKE AWAY A *HANDFUL OF USEFUL FACTS...*
A COUPLE OF NAMES...
AND THE *CERTAIN KNOWLEDGE* THAT SALLY ANNE IS *STILL ALIVE.*
NOW, ALL I HAVE TO DO IS *GET HER BACK.*
K-CHKK

NEW YORK
DEAR MATT, I KNOW I SAID I'D PROBABLY NEVER SPEAK TO YOU AGAIN, AND IN CONVERSATIONAL TERMS, I THINK THAT'S STILL THE WAY I FEEL.
MATT MURDOCK
NEW YORK, NY
BUT I WANTED TO TALK TO SOMEONE, WELL, TALK AT SOMEONE, AT LEAST, WHO'D UNDERSTAND, AND IT LOOKS LIKE YOU GET THE DUTY. I FIGURE YOU OWE ME THAT MUCH AT LEAST. SEE, THE THING IS, YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHAT I'M DOING AT THE MOMENT.
I'M FIGHTING CRIME.
WELL, MAYBE THAT'S DIGNIFYING IT A LITTLE TOO MUCH. WHAT I'M DOING, I'M HARASSING CRIMINALS.
IT FEELS GOOD, DOESN'T IT?

AND IT'S SO EASY.
K-K-KGH
I'D FORGOTTEN HOW INEPT, HOW STUPID MOST CRIMINALS ARE.
I MEAN, THAT'S WHY THEY'RE CRIMINALS, RIGHT?
COMPARED TO THE PEOPLE I'M USED TO DEALING WITH, THE SPOOKS AND THE POLITICAL CLASSES, THIS IS LIKE PLAYING TAG WITH CHILDREN.
BRA-RA-RA-RA-RAAAAP

YOU ALWAYS SAID CRIME WAS ABOUT TAKING WHAT YOU WANTED WITHOUT BEING WILLING TO PAY FOR IT.
SK-SHSHSH
AAAGH!
BUT YOU WERE WRONG ABOUT THAT, MATT.
IT'S NOT THE WHOLE STORY.

ORGANIZED CRIME IS THE EXACT OPPOSITE. IT'S ABOUT GIVING PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT, WHAT THEY REALLY DEEP DOWN WANT, AND MAKING THEM PAY FOR IT, OVER AND OVER AGAIN.
THE PROBLEM NOW FOR THESE--MORE OR LESS--ORGANIZED CRIMINALS, IS THAT THEY DO HAVE SOMETHING I REALLY DEEP DOWN WANT.
AND UNTIL I GET IT--
--THEY'RE GOING TO HAVE TO PAY THE PRICE.

TUESDAY, WE LOST THE WAREHOUSE. LAST WEEK, RAUL, ROSIE, ALBERTO AND GINO, ALL HOSPITALIZED ON THE STREET IN LESS THAN THREE DAYS. AND NOW THERE'S SEVEN MILLION DOLLARS OF MY PRODUCT FLOATING IN THE HARBOR FOR THE FISH!!!
I WANT SOME ANSWERS. I WANT TO KNOW WHO'S DOING THIS TO US. I WANT--
DR-R-R-INNNNG
RAFAEL PEREZ?
YEAH, THIS IS PEREZ. WHO THE HELL ARE YOU? HOW THE HELL DID YOU--
I'M THE PERSON YOU WANTED TO TALK TO.
WHO SAID--
YOU DID, JUST NOW.
UNLESS THE SURVEILLANCE KIT I DROPPED IN MIKEY GAMBOA'S JACKET POCKET IS ACTING UP.
MIKEY'S WEARING A WIRE???
WHA-
YEAH, WELL, DON'T HOLD IT AGAINST HIM, HE DIDN'T KNOW. BUT I FIGURED HE'D BE AT ANY MEETING YOU CALLED, SO I SORT OF BRUSHED UP AGAINST HIM ON THE WAY OUT OF THAT HOLE DOWNTOWN HE CALLS A SALSA CLUB. NOW LISTEN--
THIS IS THE LAND OF THE FREE, AFTER ALL. YOUR CLIENTS CAN GO ON SNORTING COCAINE UNTIL THEIR NOSES ROT AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED.
AND YOU CAN GO BACK TO SELLING IT TO THEM IN PEACE. IN RETURN FOR A LITTLE FAVOR.
YOU ARE OUT OF YOUR DEPTH, PEREZ. THE LAST WEEK AND A HALF HAS BEEN A LITTLE OBJECT LESSON TO THAT EFFECT. BUT THE TRUTH IS I DON'T MUCH CARE ABOUT YOUR CORE BUSINESS ONE WAY OR THE OTHER.

NEW YORK
...DO HAVE SOMETHING I REALLY DEEP DOWN WANT AND UNTIL I GET IT, THEY'RE GOING TO HAVE TO PAY THE PRICE. OH YEAH, AND WHILE WE'RE ON THE SUBJECT, MATT, YOU KNOW YOU NEVER REALLY--
THAT'S IT, THE REST OF IT'S, WELL, PERSONAL STUFF, YOU KNOW. YOU DON'T NEED TO HEAR IT.
KLIK
REALLY?
BUT IT TIES IN, DOESN'T IT? WITH WHAT YOU'RE HEARING OUT OF MIAMI?
YEAH, SOMEONE'S STIRRING THINGS UP DOWN THERE. GOT THE WHOLE MIAMI VICE UNDERGROUND TYING ITSELF IN KNOTS BY ALL ACCOUNTS.
"THEY DO HAVE SOMETHING I REALLY DEEP DOWN WANT". WHAT THE HELL WOULD THAT BE?
I DON'T KNOW. THE TRAIL WENT COLD AFTER SHE KILLED MCMASTERS. BUT IF SHE IS BACK IN MIAMI--
--THEN WE WON'T BE THE ONLY ONES LOOKING FOR HER THERE.

...WAS AT A PARTY IN CORAL GABLES, ASK ANYONE...
SO WHAT'S REALLY DRIVING *YOU*, KESTREL?
WE'VE BEEN OVER THIS, MARTIN.
NO, WE HAVEN'T.
YOU TOLD ME *THE WIDOW* KILLED YOUR PARTNER. BUT THAT ISN'T IT. I *KNOW* WOMEN--
OH, *PLEASE*.
....GOT *NOTHING*, MAN. MY LAWYER'S GONNA...
YOU'RE WORKING OFF *GUILT*, KESTREL, PURE AND SIMPLE. IT'S WHAT *WOMEN DO BEST*, AND YOU'RE *NO DIFFERENT*, WHATEVER *SEXUAL PREFERENCES* YOU MAY HAVE *DELUDED* YOURSELF INTO.

WELL, AT LEAST I HAVE SEXUAL PREFERENCES. I DON'T JUST SLEEP WITH ANYTHING THAT FALLS OUT OF THE SKY ON ME, NOT LIKE SOME PEOPLE I COULD NAME.
NOW WHY DON'T YOU KNOCK OFF THE FRAT BOY CONVERSION CRUSADE? I'VE TOLD YOU I'M GAY AND IT AIN'T ABOUT TO CHANGE.
THAT'S A SIN AGAINST GOD, YOU KNOW.
YEAH, RIGHT.
NOT TO MENTION WHAT YOU'RE MISSING BY--
KNOCK IT OFF, MARTIN. JUST FOCUS ON THE TASK AT HAND, WILL YOU?
WHAT FOR? NONE OF THESE GUYS IS GOING TO CRACK. LOOK AT THE FACES, MAN. THEY'RE NEARLY AS BORED AS I AM.
...MY PHONE CALL, YOU SCHMUCK.
WELL, THEN DO SOMETHING USEFUL, WHY DON'T YOU?
YEAH? LIKE WHAT?
I DON'T KNOW. GET IN THERE AND START THROWING SOME OF THAT ALPHA MALE WEIGHT OF YOURS AROUND. THAT SHOULD TAKE THE EDGE OFF YOUR BOREDOM.
YOU REALLY WANT ME TO DO THAT?
I WOULD LOVE YOU TO DO THAT.

PLAK
HELLO, PABLO.
GOT A COUPLA QUESTIONS FOR YOU.
AW MAN, WHO THE F--?
KRAK-K-K
AAAGH!
GURGH
KRUG

NOW, I WANT YOU TO TELL ME--
MAN, I GOT *RIGHTS*, I GOT--
AIAIAIAIAGH!
WHO *ARE* YOU, MAN?
THAT'S *CLASSIFIED*, I'M AFRAID.
AS IS *EVERYTHING* THAT'S ABOUT TO HAPPEN TO *YOU*.
BUT IF IT *HELPS*--
JUST THINK OF ME AS A *CRIME-FIGHTER*.
AIAIAIAIAIAGH... NOOOOO, DON'T, NOOOOOOOO.....

THIS PAINS ME, BOBBY.
I THOUGHT WE HAD THIS GAME CHUPADO. WE'VE BOTH BEEN IN IT FOR LONG ENOUGH.
BOTH GOT THE LIFE. HOUSES, BOATS, FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES, KIDS IN GOOD SCHOOLS. DANNY GRADUATES FROM M.I.T. NEXT YEAR. AND YOUR LISA'S A SHOE-IN FOR HARVARD LAW.
YEAH, JUST DON'T TELL HER THAT. SHE DON'T STUDY HARD ENOUGH FOR MY LIKING.
I GO FISHING WITH THE GOVERNOR COUPLE OF TIMES A MONTH. THE MAYOR HAS ME OVER FOR THANKSGIVING.
YOU'VE GOT YOUR CORPORATE PALS AND YOUR LAND DEALS.
WE'VE BOTH COME A LONG WAY FROM DUCKING INTERDICTION RADAR OUT THERE IN THE KEYS.
RIGHT.

AND NOW SOME *PSYCHO EX-COMMIE* PUTA WANTS TO TEAR IT ALL DOWN AROUND US.
WHAT IS THAT, BOBBY?
UNDERSTAND, BOBBY, I *RESPECT* THE BUSINESS DIRECTIONS YOU'VE MOVED IN. AND I KNOW THESE SUITS YOU'RE IN BED WITH HAVE BROUGHT IN SOME BENEFITS FOR US ALL.
BUT THEY'RE NOT OUR PEOPLE, AND IN THE END *THEY'LL HANG US OUT TO DRY* IF IT TURNS A PROFIT FOR THEM.
NOW I WANT YOU TO THINK *VERY SERIOUSLY* ABOUT YOUR LOYALTIES HERE, BOBBY. BECAUSE THIS WOMAN DOESN'T SEEM INTERESTED IN BUSTING OUR BALLS OVER *PRODUCT*. ALL SHE WANTS IS INFORMATION, WHICH *YOU* APPARENTLY CAN GIVE HER. AND SHE'S GIVEN YOU THE NUMBER TO CALL.
RAFAEL, WE *CAN'T DO THAT*. I CAN'T DO THAT.
WHAT ARE YOU TELLING ME, BOBBY? THEY GOT SOMETHING ON YOU?
HOW DEEP IN ARE YOU?
MAN, IT ISN'T THAT. DON'T YOU *GET IT*, RAF?. THIS STUFF, THIS WOMAN, ALL OF IT, IT'S *POLITICAL*.

THESE PEOPLE *INVADE COUNTRIES*, RAF. THEY *BOMB CAPITAL CITIES BEFORE BREAKFAST*. IT'S A WHOLE DIFFERENT *SCALE*. ALL THAT JUICE YOU GOT WITH THE GOVERNOR AND THE MAYOR, THAT'S WORTH *NOTHING* WHERE THESE PEOPLE ARE CONCERNED. THEY'D TAKE THE GOVERNOR OUT WITH *NAPALM* IF IT SUITED THEM.
IF THEY FIND OUT WE'RE WITH THIS WOMAN...
WHAT? THEY'LL GO TO WAR WITH US?
I DON'T LIKE BEING *THREATENED*, BOBBY. NOT IN MY OWN TOWN. NOT BY SOME *EX-COMMIE SPOOK*, AND EVEN LESS BY A BUNCH OF *ANGLO SUITS*.
SO YOU *SORT THIS OUT*.
COME *MONDAY NEXT*, I WANT TO HEAR IT'S OVER, ONE WAY OR THE OTHER. THEN WE CAN ALL GO BACK TO *MAKING MONEY*, *SHAKING HANDS WITH THE GOVERNOR* AND *SMILING FOR THE SOCIETY PAGES*.
GOT IT?
YEAH, I GOT IT.
GOOD. THEN GET IT DONE.

YOU'VE REACHED THE VOICE MAIL OF **THE BLACK WIDOW, EX-SUPERSPY AND CRIME FIGHTER EXTRAORDINAIRE.** I'M OUT FIGHTING CRIME RIGHT NOW. PLEASE LEAVE A MESSAGE.
AH...YEAH. THIS IS **BOBBY CAMPERO.** YOU...AH... YOU ASKED ME TO CALL YOU. I THINK IT'S TIME WE TALK.
WELL, IF ***YOU*** SAY SO.
RED LIGHT UP AHEAD, BOBBY. HOW ABOUT YOU ***CURB YOUR CRIMINAL TENDENCIES*** AND PULL OVER HERE?

THAT'S BETTER.
NOW *WHERE* IS *SALLY ANNE CARTER?*
LOOK, I *DON'T KNOW* THE BI--
SURE YOU DO, BOBBY. WE TALKED ABOUT THIS LAST TIME I PHONED.
THREE, FOUR WEEKS BACK, YOU GOT HER PATCHED UP AT YOUR *PET SURGEON'S* HOME IN MIAMI BEACH. THEN YOU TOOK HER AWAY SOMEWHERE ELSE.
WHERE?
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. I TALK TO YOU ABOUT THIS, I'M *DEAD AS SOON AS THEY FIND OUT.*
YEAH? WELL, HERE'S A *NEWSFLASH,* BOBBY.
YOU *DON'T* TALK TO ME ABOUT IT, YOU'RE GOING TO BE DEAD *RIGHT NOW.*
TARGET ACQUIRED. I'M TAKING THE SHOT.

BLACK WIDOW (2005) #3

"HELP AND THOSE WHO NEED IT"

...COMING UP ON 3 A.M. HERE IN MIAMI...THIS IS CARMEN BRANT AND BIG BLUE RADIO...
...AND FOR ALL OF YOU STILL OUT THERE CRUISING, STILL LOOKING FOR SOMETHING...WELL...
I HOPE YOU FIND IT TONIGHT, OKAY...
OKAY, OKAY, I'LL TELL YOU WHAT YOU WANT TO KNOW, JUST--
AND WHAT'S MORE, I HOPE IT'S STILL THERE IN ONE PIECE FOR YOU WHEN THE SUN COMES UP.
TARGET ACQUIRED. I'M TAKING THE SHOT.
THIS IS CURVE, PLAYING US OUT WITH PERISH. GOOD NIGHT ...AND SWEET DREAMS.
NEGATIVE. YOU STAND DOWN, MARTIN.
WE TAKE HER ALIVE.
UH, UH, I DON'T THINK SO, KESTREL.

THIS IS *AMERICA'S MOST WANTED* I'M LOOKING DOWN THE BARREL AT. I PULL THIS TRIGGER, THE *WORST* THAT HAPPENS IS THEY GIVE ME A *MEDAL.*
THIS WOMAN TOOK *EVERYTHING* AWAY FROM ME.
NOW I'M GONNA SPLATTER HER BRAINS OVER THAT RAG-TOP'S UPHOLSTERY--

--AND IT IS GOING TO FEEL SOOOO GOOD I CAN--
AAAAAAAAGH!!
NO REAL ROADS IN THE DARIEN, YOU GOT TO--
WHAT THE--
NO... YOU... DON'T...
OUT!!!
KR-AAK
KLUG-G-G
SKI-INGGG

THIS IS S.H.I.E.L.D. COMMAND. CEASE FIRE IMMEDIATELY, OR WE WILL SHOOT YOU DOWN!
DHAMA-DHAMA-DHAMA
YOU WILL NOT BE WARNED AGAIN!
WHAT THE *HELL* IS GOING ON UP THERE?
I DON'T KNOW, BUT *RIGHT NOW* IT'S NOT OUR PRINCIPAL PROBLEM.
NOW *LET'S GO!*

THERE'S A HELIPAD AT THE PELTIER CENTER. YOU WILL LAND THERE AND WE WILL FOLLOW YOU IN. DEVIATE FROM MY INSTRUCTIONS AND I WILL SHOOT YOU OUT OF THE SKY.
OVER HERE!!

THEY MUST HAVE COME THROUGH HERE. LOOK.
BOBBY
AND THAT'S ***THE SEA*** DOWN THERE, RIGHT?
MARTINEZ, BENSON, GET ON THE RADIO AND TELL THE OTHERS TO START A SEARCH PATTERN MOVING SOUTH. THEN THE TWO OF YOU TAKE THE JEEP AND MOVE IT DOWN TO BLOCK THE MARINA END. THE REST OF YOU, COME WITH ME.
AND ***LET'S GET THIS CLEAR.***
I WANT THAT RUSSIAN TROLLOP ***ALIVE*** BUT THAT'S ALL. IF SHE GIVES YOU TROUBLE, YOU ***SHOOT HER LEGS OUT FROM UNDER HER.***
AND THEN YOU ***WITHHOLD MEDICAL ATTENTION*** UNTIL I GET THERE.

GUESS SHE MUST WANT THIS *BLACK WIDOW* PRETTY BAD, HUH? GOTTA BE *PERSONAL*, SOMETHING LIKE THAT, RIGHT?
ARE YOU *KIDDING?* THAT *COMMIE PUTA'S* ON AMERICA'S MOST WANTED LIST, MAN.
SHE'S A *DAMNED TRAITOR*. GOT LINKS WITH CASTRO'S *CUBANS* AN' EVERYTHING.
MAN, YOU EXILIO GUYS ARE *SO PARANOID* ABOUT THAT STUFF.
WHAT I HEAR, THE WIDOW ICED KESTREL'S *PARTNER* AND NOW SHE'S--
CHUNK

THTT, THTT
THGGGGG
FIGURES YOU GUYS MUST HAVE TRANSPORT PARKED SOMEWHERE AROUND--
--AH--
BOBBY, MY FRIEND, I THINK WE'VE GOT--
BOBBY?
OH, FOR GOD'S SAKE...

BOBBY!
AAAGH!!
WHAT DO YOU WANT?
NNN-MHMMM

ALRIGHT, BOBBY, I THINK WE'LL TAKE YOU SEDATED FROM HERE,
NUR-NURRGH-MMMMMM
I ASKED YOU A QUESTION, MATT.
WELL?
ISN'T IT OBVIOUS WHY I'M HERE?
NO, IT'S NOT. WHAT HAPPENED, DID HELL'S KITCHEN GET TOO GENTRIFIED TO NEED YOUR SERVICES ANYMORE?
OR HAVE YOU JUST FALLEN OUT WITH YOUR LITTLE GREEK NINJA DOLLY AGAIN? BECAUSE THIS TIME AROUND I'M AFRAID I DON'T--
YOU CALLED ME, NATASHA.
YOU SENT ME THE TAPE, YOU TOLD ME WHAT YOU WERE DOING DOWN HERE.
YEAH, I TOLD YOU. I DIDN'T ASK YOU TO COME DOWN AND JOIN IN.
IT WASN'T AN INVITATION, MATT.
THEN WHAT WAS IT?

JUST DO US BOTH A FAVOR AND STAY OUT OF MY WAY, MATT.
I'M HERE TO HELP, NATASHA. FURY, TOO. WE BOTH ARE.
FURY, TOO?
UHH...
SO WHAT IS THIS, THE HELL'S KITCHEN BOYS' ANNUAL OUTING TO DISNEY WORLD?
NATASHA, YOU'D BE DEAD NOW, IF FURY HADN'T FIRED THAT FLARE UP THERE.
YEAH, WELL FURY OWES ME A SOLID OR TWO, SO I DON'T FEEL SO BAD ABOUT THAT.
OWES YOU? OWES YOU FOR WHAT?

THAT'S BETWEEN FURY AND ME, MATT.
MAYBE IF YOU GET HIM *DRUNK ENOUGH*, HE'LL TELL YOU. BUT *I'M* NOT GOING TO.
BUT...*WAIT A MINUTE.* I *HELPED* YOU, THIS GUY WAS *GETTING AWAY* WHEN I...HE *WOULD* HAVE GOT AWAY.
NO, HE WOULDN'T.
GO HOME, MATT. YOU CAN'T HELP ME WITH THIS STUFF, IT'S *POLITICAL.*
WHOLE *OTHER MORAL GRADIENT*-- YOU WOULDN'T LIKE IT AT ALL.

DARIEN GAP
I REALLY DON'T SEE WHY SHE CAN'T BE PLACED WITH GENERAL POPULATION RIGHT NOW. THE WOUNDS ARE HEALING FAST ENOUGH.
YES-- PERHAPS TOO FAST, IN FACT. AND THAT'S THE POINT.
WE'VE INHERITED THIS YOUNG WOMAN WITH VERY LITTLE KNOWLEDGE OF HER BACKGROUND. ALL WE KNOW IS THAT GYNACON AND THEIR RUSSIAN ASSOCIATES CONSIDERED HER IMPORTANT.
THERE'S A VERY REAL POSSIBILITY THAT SHE HAS SOME CONNECTION WITH THE BLACK WIDOW PROGRAM.
THE BLACK--?
COME ON, BLAIR, YOU CAN'T STILL BE BUYING INTO THAT OLD COLD WAR MYTHOLOGY. WE'RE PRIVATE SECTOR THESE DAYS.
IT APPEARS IAN MCMASTERS BOUGHT INTO THAT MYTHOLOGY--QUITE LITERALLY. MOST OF THE BIOTECH PATENTS WE'VE ACQUIRED ALONG WITH GYNACON DERIVE FROM BLACK WIDOW OR RELATED RUSSIAN MILITARY RESEARCH.
AND UNTIL WE CAN BE SURE WHAT SLEEPING BEAUTY HERE HAS TO DO WITH IT ALL, YOU ARE TO HANDLE WITH CARE.
YOU'RE NOT SLAPPING THE ELECTRODES ON CHILEAN JOURNALISTS ANYMORE, FERNANDO, MUCH THOUGH YOU MIGHT MISS IT. THAT'S ALL BEHIND US NOW. WE'VE GOT MARKET SHARE TO THINK ABOUT.

WHERE... AM I?
SO GRINGA, YOU'RE AWAKE, HUH?
I... LISTEN, WHO WERE THOSE GUYS?
WELL...THAT YOUNG ONE, I DON'T KNOW HIM. THEY SAY HE COMES DOWN HERE FROM GRINGOLANDIA SOMETIMES, LIKE SOME KIND OF OBSERVER, Y'KNOW. BUT THE OLD GUY, THAT'S CORONEL DOCTOR OCHOA. AND YOU BETTER WALK SOFT ROUND HIM.
OH, OKAY, I KNOW THE TYPE. GOT A TEMPER ON HIM, RIGHT?
TEMPER?
WHAT'S YOUR NAME, GRINGA?

SALLY ANNE CARTER.
WELL, SALLY ANNE CARTER-- YOU HEARD OF *PINOCHET*, NO?
PINOCHET? IS THAT, LIKE, A FRAGRANCE?
MADRE DE DIOS, PINOCHET, *AUGUSTO* PINOCHET! WAS *PRESIDENTE* OF *CHILE!*
YOU HEARD OF *CHILE*, RIGHT?
UH, SURE, IT'S A COUNTRY, IT'S IN...UH...
IT'S A COUNTRY.
RIGHT, IT'S A *COUNTRY.*
WELL, THIRTY YEARS AGO, THE MILITARY IN CHILE, THEY DECIDE IT'S TIME TO TAKE OVER THAT COUNTRY. AND ANYONE DOESN'T LIKE IT, THEY JUST *DISAPPEAR*, RIGHT?
DISAPPEAR?

THAT'S *RIGHT*, GRINGA. MEN COME TO THEIR HOUSES AND *TAKE THEM AWAY*, OR STOP THEM IN THE STREET AND *PULL THEM INTO CARS*. NO-ONE SEES THEM AGAIN.
THEY TAKE *MEN*, THEY TAKE *WOMEN*, SOMETIMES *PREGNANT WOMEN*, IT *DOESN'T MATTER*, THEY TAKE *CHILDREN* TOO...
THEY *BEAT THEM*, THEY *TORTURE THEM WITH ELECTRICITY*, THE WOMEN THEY *RAPE*, MANY, *MANY* TIMES. SOMETIMES THEY *KILL* THE PERSON, SOMETIMES THAT PERSON *DIES BY ACCIDENT* IN THE TORTURE. BUT THEY HAVE *DOCTORS* TO MAKE SURE THAT DOESN'T HAPPEN TOO OFTEN.
OCHOA WAS ONE OF THOSE MEN.

WHEN HE WAS A YOUNG MAN, YOUR C.I.A. TRAINED HIM IN TORTURE AND INTERROGATION--
NOT MY C.I.A. I WASN'T EVEN BORN THIRTY YEARS AGO.
AND NOR WERE YOU, SO HOW COME YOU KNOW ALL THIS STUFF?
BECAUSE I READ HISTORY BOOKS, GRINGA. AND SO SHOULD YOU.
¿MARIELA? ¿DONDE ESTA?
OYE, CHICA. ¿DONDE SE HA METIDO AHORA?
YOU PRETEND TO BE ASLEEP. WE'LL TALK LATER. MY NAME IS--
¡¡MARIELA!!
¿QUE COÑO HACE TODAVIA AQUI? ¡¡HAY SEIS CUARTOS MAS QUE LIMPIAR!! ¡¡SEIS!!

¿QUIERE QUE TE LLEVEN OTRA VEZ AL *CUARTO DE CASTIGOS?* ¿ES *ESO?* ¿QUIERE QUE TE *PINCHEN* OTRA VEZ?
"CUARTO DE CASTIGOS"?
GROW UP IN *TEXAS* THESE DAYS, YOU'RE BOUND TO LEARN *SOME* SPANISH. *"PINCHAR"*, THAT'S TALKING ABOUT AN *INJECTION.*
MAYBE A *FIX.*
"CUARTO" IS A ROOM, SHE THREATENED TO TAKE HER TO SOME ROOM.
"CASTIGO". *"CASTIGO"* IS...
PUNISHMENT.

GET IN MY WAY, WILL YOU, FURY?
KRUG
TRY TO BUCK NORTH AND THE N.S.A., WILL YOU?
CAREFUL, MARTIN. NOTHING PERMANENT, REMEMBER.
THAK
MR. FURY HAS AN APPOINTMENT WITH A CONGRESSIONAL HEARING IN HIS NEAR FUTURE. HE HAS TO LOOK PRESENTABLE.
SISSY!
THAT ALL YOU GOT, MOMMY'S BOY?
KRAK
FERRIS!!!
BACK OFF, FERRIS! I GAVE THIS MAN TO YOU, NOW I'M TELLING YOU, YOU DON'T WANT TO FOLLOW HIM INTO THAT CHAIR, YOU BACK OFF RIGHT NOW!

GO ON, GET OUT. GO AND COOL OFF.
I'LL CALL YOU BACK WHEN I NEED YOU.
YOU BROUGHT THIS ON YOURSELF, FURY. GETTING BETWEEN NORTH AND WHAT'S OURS, THREATENING AN ACCREDITED N.S.A. AGENT IN THE PURSUIT OF HIS DUTIES. AIDING AND ABETTING A KNOWN TERRORIST.
GET THE PICTURE?
THE PATRIOT ACT'S STILL IN FORCE, WE STILL HAVE A MANDATE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. YOU'RE LOOKING AT RENDITION OR GUANTANAMO, COLONEL. AND EITHER WAY, THEY'RE GOING TO BREAK YOU FOR WHAT YOU'VE DONE.
HEH-HEH-HEH...
WHAT'S SO DAMN FUNNY?
I SAID WHAT'S SO DAMN FUNNY, FURY?
HEH-HEH =KOF= HEH...THAT'S A NICE...SHIRT, ALEX. =KO-KO-KOF= MUST HAVE BEEN...EXPENSIVE. SO WHITE TOO. A REAL =KOF= HIGH-SOCIETY SHIRT.
FERRIS MUST HAVE KNOCKED SOMETHING LOOSE, FURY. YOU'RE RAMBLING.
I BET YOU TRY REALLY HARD TO KEEP THAT SHIRT CLEAN.
AND NOW IT'S COVERED IN BLOOD.

OH, MAN.
THAT'S ALL I NEED.
HEY, GRINGA. GUESS WHO JUST BEEN IN THE STOREHOUSE. YOU WANT SOME STOLEN CANDY?
RIGHT AT THIS MOMENT, NO. THAT'S NOT WHAT I NEED.
SO THEY FIT OKAY?
THEY'LL DO.
MARIELA, WHAT IS THIS PLACE? I MEAN, WHY ARE THEY KEEPING US HERE? DO THEY...YOU KNOW, LIKE YOU SAID ABOUT CHILE...DO THEY...HURT US...
NOT IF YOU'RE A GOOD GIRL...DON'T CAUSE TROUBLE, DO AS YOU'RE TOLD...DON'T RESIST...
DON'T STEAL CANDY.

SO YOU EVER TRY TO *BREAK OUT?*
UH-HUH. *TWICE.*
SO WHAT HAPPENED?
WHAT DO YOU *THINK* HAPPENED? DIDN'T WORK. TOOK ME TO CASTIGOS FOR A WHILE.
THIS PLACE IS *LOCKED DOWN TIGHT,* GRINGA. NO WAY ANY OF US GETTING OUT OF HERE WITHOUT *SOMEONE ON THE OUTSIDE* COMES TO HELP. AND I GOT *NO-ONE* OUT THERE CARES ENOUGH TO COME LOOKING FOR ME.
WHAT ABOUT YOU?
"THERE ANYONE OUT THERE LOOKING FOR YOU, SALLY ANNE?"

BLACK WIDOW (2005) #4

“WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST”

MIAMI
UNDERSTAND, GRACIELA, WE *WILL* FIND HIM. YOU HAVE MY WORD. AND THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS ARE GOING TO PAY.
I DON'T *CARE* ABOUT THAT, RAFAEL. I JUST WANT BOBBY BACK. I WANT HIM *ALIVE* AND I WANT HIM *BACK*.
I THOUGHT WE WERE *PAST* THIS.
I THOUGHT WE WERE *RESPECTABLE* NOW.
WE *ARE*, GRACIELA. THAT'S THE PROBLEM.
THIS *WASN'T* PRODUCT-RELATED, IT'S *POLITICAL*, IT'S BOBBY'S *CORPORATE FRIENDS*.
HIS *RESPECTABLE* FRIENDS.

THEN WHY WON'T THEY HELP US, RAFAEL?
YOU GO FISHING WITH THE GOVERNOR. YOU'RE FRIENDS WITH THE MAYOR--
NOT ON THIS ONE.
THE MAYOR WON'T TAKE MY CALLS. AND RIGHT NOW, THE GOVERNOR WOULDN'T HAND ME A CRAB CANAPÉ IF I WAS STARVING.
THESE ARE NOT MEN OF HONOR, GRACIELA. THEY'RE ANGLOS, THEY'RE SCARED, AND THEY'RE CLOSING RANKS. THEY DON'T WANT TO KNOW US ANYMORE.
WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO HANDLE THIS OURSELVES.
THEN YOU'LL FAIL.

YOUR COCAINE MONEY AND YOUR O.C. CONNECTIONS AREN'T GOING TO BE ENOUGH THIS TIME, I'M AFRAID. THIS--
YOU WANNA DIE?
PUT IT AWAY, IDIOTA.
WHO ARE YOU?
WHO AM I?
I'M THE ANSWER TO YOUR PRAYERS, MA'AM.

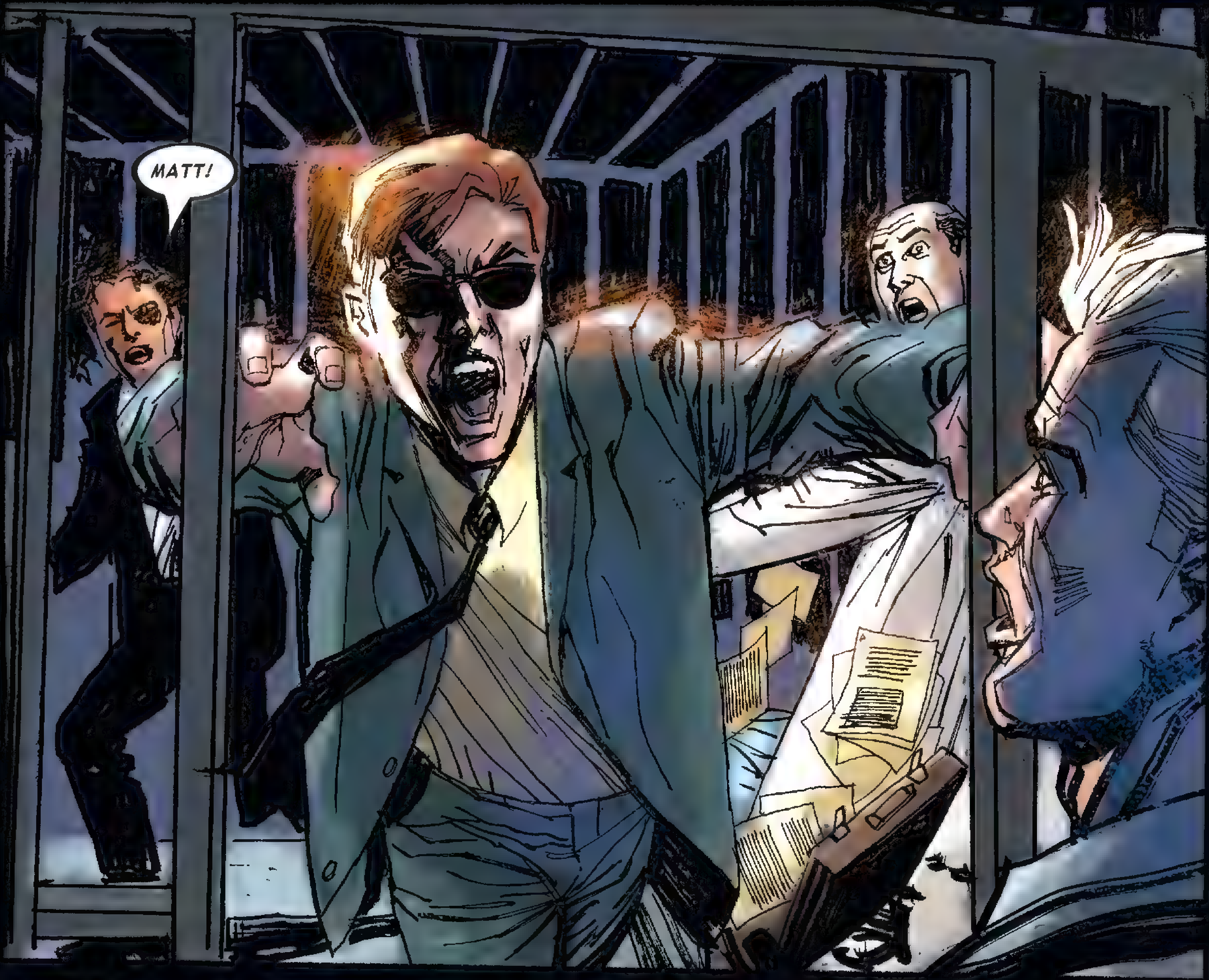
DARIEN GAP
AIEEE, NO, POR EL AMOR DE DIOS, NO, NO, NOOOOOOOO!
NO, POR FAVOR, NO, NO, NAAAGH!
THAT'S BEATRIZ. THIRD TIME FOR HER IN CASTIGOS, THAT'S HOW COME SHE SCREAMING SO MUCH. SHE KNOWS WHAT THEY GONNA DO THIS TIME.
WHAT...WHAT ARE THEY GOING TO...TO DO TO HER?
WHAT YOU THINK THEY GONNA DO TO HER, GRINGA?
BUT, BUT THIS...THIS IS CRAZY, MARIELA. WHAT'S SHE DONE?
SAME AS ALWAYS, GRINGA. THE BIG CRIME FOR ALL OF US.
SHE RESISTS.

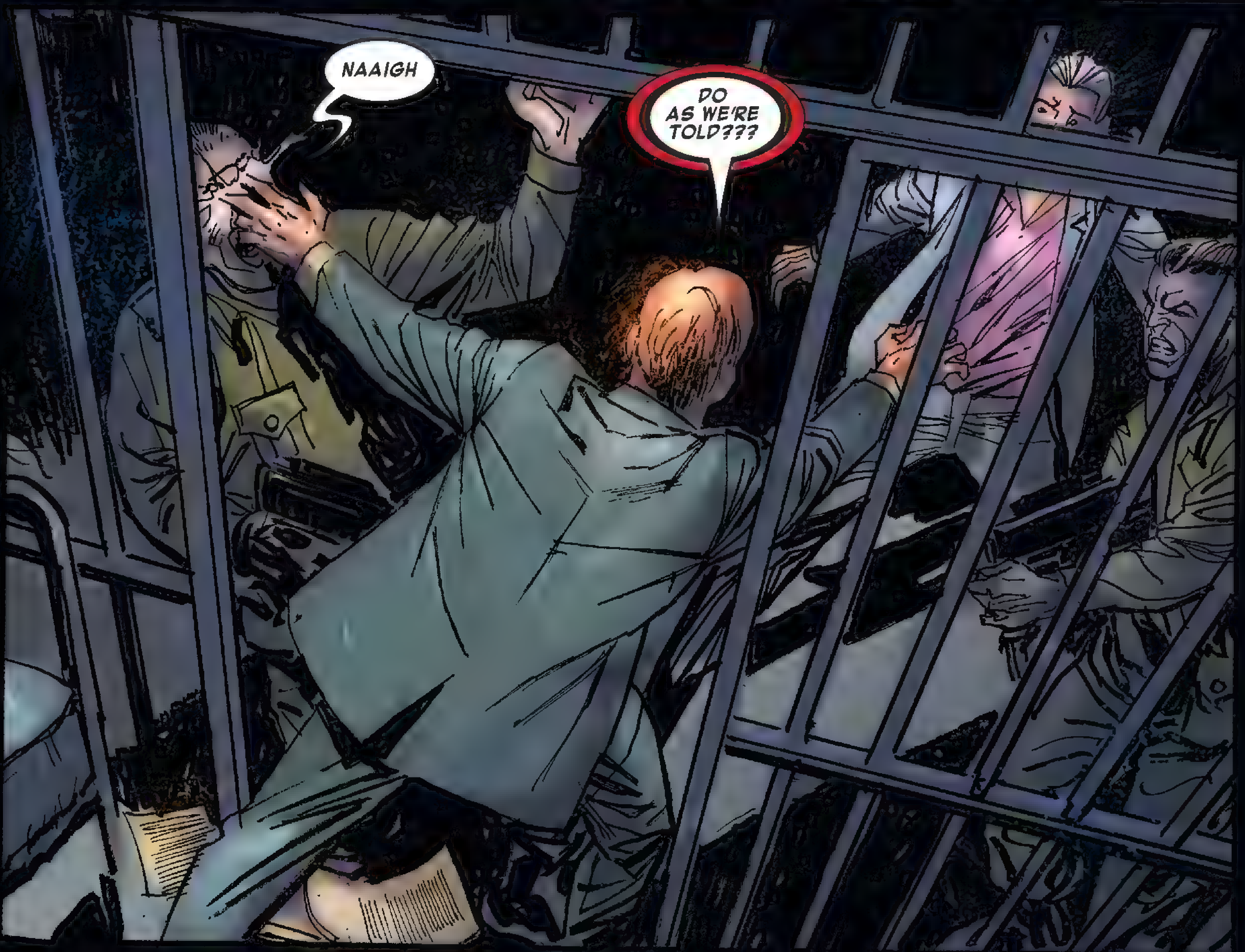
NOOOOONYAAAAAAA...
IT GOES ON ALL NIGHT.
AAAAAAA...
CASTIGOS IS SUPPOSED TO BE SOUNDPROOFED, BUT YOU CAN STILL HEAR BEATRIZ THROUGH THE WALLS.
AA-NO-NO-NO-NONYAAAA...
YOU CAN STILL HEAR WHAT THEY'RE DOING TO HER.
AAAA-
AND THEN IT STOPS.
AND THEY COME FOR ME.

YOU GOT A DAUGHTER, RIGHT, BOBBY?
YEAH. SO?
SO IT DOESN'T BOTHER YOU, GIRLS THE SAME AGE BEING SHIPPED OUT TO A CONCENTRATION CAMP LIKE THIS? GIRLS JUST LIKE YOUR DAUGHTER?
HEY, FIRST OF ALL, YOU DON'T COMPARE MY LISA WITH THAT PIECE OF WHITE TRASH--
I JUST DID.
YOU F--
HER NAME IS SALLY ANNE. SHE'S FIFTEEN YEARS OLD. SHE GOT THE KIND OF START IN LIFE I WOULDN'T WISH ON A STALINIST, AND SHE'S STILL ON HER FEET, FIGHTING TO STAY THERE.
SHE'S WORTH TEN OF THAT SPOILED STUPID BRAT YOU'VE GOT WRAPPED IN COTTON WOOL BACK IN MIAMI.
YOU INSULT HER AGAIN, AND I WILL HURT YOU SO BADLY THERE'LL BE BLOOD IN YOUR URINE FOR A MONTH.

LOOK, I... I *SAVED* THIS... THIS SALLY ANNE'S *LIFE.* SHE WAS *BLEEDING TO DEATH* WHEN THEY GAVE HER TO ME.
IT WAS *ME* THAT GOT HER PATCHED UP.
YEAH. AND THEN SHIPPED HER OFF FOR *EXPERIMENTATION* IN A CUTTING CORPORATION LABORATORY.
GUESS SHE SHOULD BE THANKING YOU, HUH?
HEY, I DIDN'T *MAKE* THE WORLD THE WAY IT IS. I'M JUST TRYING TO *MAKE A LIVING*.
YEAH, I'VE SEEN WHERE YOU LIVE. TOUGH FOR YOU, SCRAPING BY LIKE THAT.
LISTEN, I EARN EVERY--
OH, *SHUT UP,* BOBBY. I *REALLY* DON'T CARE HOW YOU JUSTIFY YOUR *MISERABLE MERCHANT EXISTENCE.*
IF *YELENA* COULD SEE ME NOW.
ARGUING MORALITY WITH A *COKE DEALER TURNED CORPORATE LACKEY.*
I NEED MY *DAMNED HEAD EXAMINED.*

GUANTANAMO BAY
THERE'S NO SIGN OF A *CONCUSSION*, BUT SOME OF THIS BRUISING I DON'T LIKE AT ALL.
LOOKS LIKE A LOT OF REPEATED BLOWS TO THE FACE.
INJURIES *HARDLY CONSISTENT* WITH THE SELF-HARM MY *ESTEEMED MILITARY COLLEAGUES* REPORT.
I TOLDYA DOC, HE *THREW HIMSELF DOWN THE STAIRS ON THE WAY TO THE SHOWER.* NOTHING WE COULDA DONE.
ALRIGHT, THAT'S *ENOUGH*, BLAIR. I WANT MY CLIENT RELEASED *IMMEDIATELY* FOR AN MRI SCAN AND A FULL NEUROLOGICAL CHECK.
YOUR CLIENT, MR. MURDOCK, IS *INDEFINITELY DETAINED* UNDER U.S.A. PATRIOT LEGISLATION RELATING TO DOMESTIC AND QUITE POSSIBLY INTERNATIONAL *TERRORISM.*
HE'S GOING *NOWHERE.*
YOU *BUCKET OF SCUM*, BLAIR. I'M GOING TO HAVE YOU *INDICTED* FOR--
NOT UNDER *THIS* ADMINISTRATION, YOU AREN'T. READ *THE NATIONAL SECURITY FINE PRINT.*
YOU'RE GOING TO *DO AS YOU'RE TOLD*, JUST LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE.


MATT!


NAAIGH
DO AS WE'RE TOLD???

I'LL SHOW YOU DO AS WE'RE TOLD, YOU!
NAAGH
KRAG
GURRGH!
KRUG
MATT, DON'T--
URGH!
KLUG
KRAK

MATT!!!!
N-N- NO, NO, N-
MATT, STOP IT! YOU'RE NOT HELPING ME!!!
MATT, LISTEN TO ME. I'LL BE OKAY, THESE GUYS HAVE BITTEN OFF MORE THAN THEY CAN CHEW, THEY JUST DON'T KNOW IT YET.
BUT--
NO, LISTEN. I'VE GOT STUFF ON THE NORTH HIERARCHY THAT MEANS THEY'LL HAVE TO SPIT ME OUT SOONER OR LATER.
AND MEANTIME, I'VE GOT A HARD IRISH SKULL TO FALL BACK ON.
BUT YOU HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE NOW. THE GUY THAT DID THIS TO ME, FERRIS, HE'S HAD A RUN-IN WITH NATASHA, AND HE'S GOT SOME SERIOUS ISSUES ABOUT WHAT SHE DID TO HIM--
YEAH, HE'S NOT THE ONLY ONE. FURY, SHE TOLD ME--
NEVER MIND THAT NOW. FERRIS LEFT HERE YESTERDAY WITH SOME NSA DYKE CALLED KESTREL. HE CALLED ON THE WAY TO THE AIRPORT. BOASTED TO ME HE WAS GOING TO TAKE NATASHA APART PIECE BY PIECE.
HE SHOWED ME A HUNTING KNIFE, MATT. HE'S GONE, CRACKED IN THE HEAD. HE'LL DO IT.
YOU HAVE TO GET TO HER BEFORE THEY DO.
MR. BLAIR? ARE YOU OKAY IN THERE?
CHARLIE, ZAK? WHAT'S GOING ON?
NOW GO!!!

WHAT THE HELL'S GOING--
CHARLIE? MR. BLAIR?
CHARLIE? OH JESUS, CHARLIE?
THIS IS MATTHESON, IN HOLDING SEVEN. WE GOT A SITUATION HERE.
WHAT DID YOU DO TO CHARLIE?
JUST COOL IT, MIKE! GET THAT CAGE SHUT!
THIS IS HOLDING SEVEN, WE HAVE A PROBABLE INTRUDER ALERT.
SKREEK
UH-OH.
THERE!!!
BLAM
KI-INGGGG
YOU MISSED HIM! HE'S GOING TO GET AWAY!
YEAH, RIGHT. HE'S A FANCY NEW YORK LAWYER, A SUIT, AND HE'S BLIND.
HOW FAR YOU THINK HE'S GOING TO GET?

MIAMI
IT DOESN'T MUCH MATTER HOW FAR HE GETS, GRACIELA. WHAT COUNTS IS THAT HE'S GOING TO BE OUT THERE ANYWAY.
THIS WOMAN THAT TOOK BOBBY, THIS WIDOW PUTA, SHE TOOK FAMILY FROM THIS GUY TOO.
IT'S PERSONAL FOR HIM, JUST LIKE IT IS FOR US.
BUT LOOK AT HIM, RAFAEL. HE'S A BOY, HE'S BARELY TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OLD.
SO?
I KILLED MY FIRST MAN IN THE BARRIO WHEN I WAS HALF HIS AGE. BY THE TIME I WAS HIS AGE, I'D LOST COUNT. AND THE GIRLS AT CASA LENGUA STILL CALLED ME ANGELFACE.
APPEARANCES DECEIVE, GRACIELA. THIS BOY YOU'RE LOOKING AT IS AN EX-NAVY SEAL. IF HE'S GOING TO BE IN THIS THING, I WANT HIM PITCHING FOR US.
BUT IF HE'S A SOLDIER, RAFAEL...CAN WE TRUST HIM?
HE'S AN EX-SOLDIER.
HE'S JUST BACK FROM THE MIDDLE EAST, HE'S ANGRY, AND HE'S TIRED OF SEEING HIS FRIENDS BLOWN APART FOR SOME WAR NOBODY WANTED AND A PENSION THEIR FAMILIES CAN BARELY LIVE OFF.
HE'LL DO JUST FINE.

I'D HARDLY QUALIFY THIS AS "FINE", WOULD YOU?
THE PRODUCTIVITY CHARTS ARE THROUGH THE FLOOR.
Mandee
WE'VE GOT TEST SUBJECTS PASSING OUT, A COUPLE OF THE PREGNANT ONES HAVE MISCARRIED. OVER HALF AREN'T MAKING THE SIXTEEN-HOUR SHIFT AT ALL.
IF THIS WAS A REAL MAQUILA CONTRACT, WE'D BE LOSING SERIOUS MONEY HERE.
IT'S THE NEW DRUG MIX, SIR. YOU DID WANT COMPLIANT BEHAVIOR, LACK OF RESISTANCE TO AUTHORITY--
YES, THAT'S CORRECT.
BUT NOT AT THE COST OF TURNING OUR WORKFORCE INTO ZOMBIES!

DRONES, *YES.* ZOMBIES, *NO.*
CAN WE GET THAT DISTINCTION FIRMLY ESTABLISHED IN EVERYBODY'S MIND, PLEASE?
IN *SIX MONTHS,* OUR SPONSORS WANT TO START BRINGING IN *MALE* SUBJECTS, AND *SO FAR* WE CAN'T EVEN STABILIZE RESULTS WITH A CROP OF *WOMEN AND CHILDREN.*
THIS IS *NOT* GOING TO PLAY WELL IN A *PROGRESS REPORT,* GENTLEMEN.
CALVO, *YOU* COME WITH ME.
THE *REST* OF YOU GET BACK TO WORK. I'VE GOT A *SPECIAL DELEGATION* COMING DOWN TOMORROW, AND I CERTAINLY DON'T WANT THEIR FIRST IMPRESSION TO BE *THIS* GOD-AWFUL MESS.
WE'LL HAVE TO TRY THE *RUSSIAN ANTIDOTES* TO BRING THEM ALL BACK UP TO FUNCTIONAL LEVELS QUICKLY.
BUT--
I KNOW, I KNOW. IT'S *CLUMSY.*
WE'LL ALMOST CERTAINLY LOSE A FEW OF THEM TO *HOMEOSTATIC SHOCK* OR *COMA.*
WHICH MEANS *DISPOSAL DETAILS,* AND THEN *ANOTHER* RECRUITING TRIP TO SOME *MAGGOT-INFESTED FAVELA* SOMEWHERE.
BUT I REALLY DON'T SEE ANY VIABLE ALTERNATIVE, DO YOU?

I'M GOING TO RUN SOME *PAIN RESPONSE* TESTS ON A FEW OF THE *YOUNGER ONES*, SEE WHAT WE GET.
FINE, *WHATEVER.*
YEAH, JUST KEEP THE *NOISE DOWN* THIS TIME.
SWEAR TO GOD HE GETS A THRILL OUT OF THAT STUFF, SICK LITTLE PUPPY.
PLAK
KLAK
GURF

WATCH THIS.
SHKLIK
I'M HERE FOR SALLY ANNE CARTER. YOU TAKE HER TO ME, YOU'LL LIVE.
THAT'S A ONE-TIME BARGAIN-BASEMENT OFFER. I'D TAKE IT IF I WERE YOU.
WHO... WHO ARE YOU?

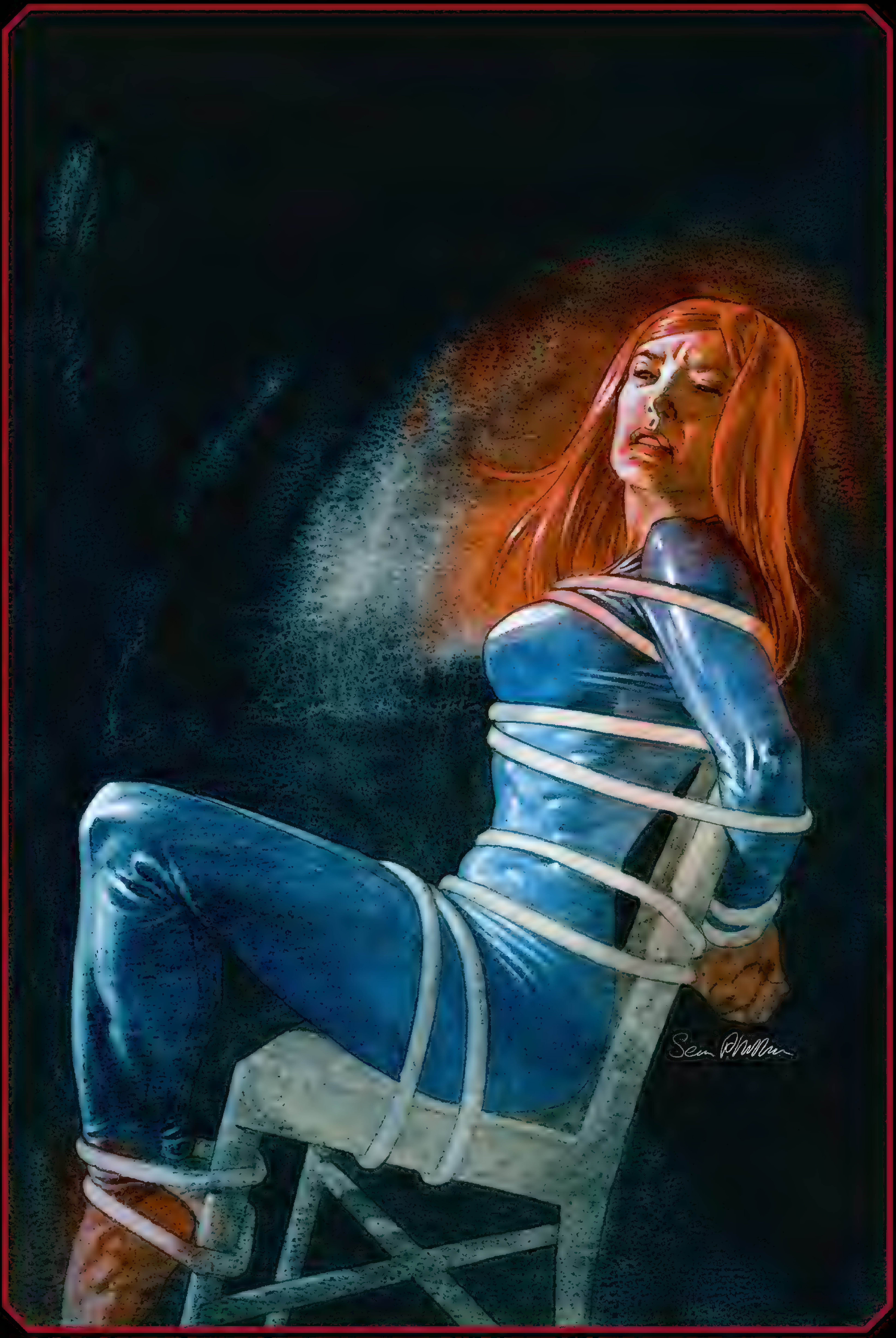
WHO AM I?
I'M THE RUSSIAN ANTIDOTE.

WELL?
SALLY ANNE?
SALLY ANNE?
NUH, NUH, NUTASH? NUH, NUH....
YOU SEE, SHE'S OKAY, SHE'S OKAY, YOU SEE. IT'S JUST THE DRUGS, IT'LL WEAR OFF IN A COUPLE OF DAYS, HONEST, SHE LOOKS BAD, BUT--
DON'T YOU TOUCH HER!

LOOK, YOU SAID--
KRAK
MARI... MARIELA

GOTTA GET... MARIELA...
SSHHH. SALLY ANNE, YOU'VE GOT TO *SHUT UP NOW.* I CAN'T GET YOU OUT OF HERE THE WAY I CAME IN.
GENERADOR
RUGN-RUGN-RUGN-RUGN-RUGN
SIX... FIVE... FOUR...
MARI... ELA--
KRA-KHUMMMP
FIRE! FIRE!
WHAT THE *HELL* IS GOING ON DOWN THERE?
COME ON, COME ON.
HOY!!!!

HOY! ESCAPEE! HELP! STOP!
I'M IN LUCK. HE SOUNDS LIKE A REAL PRO.
HELP! ESCAPEE! QUICK!!
BUT EVEN AN IDIOT LIKE THIS CAN PULL A TRIGGER.
AND THERE'S NO COVER FOR TWENTY METERS AT LEAST.
YOU GET OUT OF HERE, SALLY ANNE.
CRAWL, IF YOU HAVE TO--BUT GET OUT.
NOW GO!!!
I'LL TAKE CARE OF THIS.
COME ON THEN, BABY! COME TO MOMMA!



BLACK WIDOW (2005) #5
“DO YOU FEEL BETTER NOW?”

GUANTANAMO BAY
THAT'S NOT *MY* *FOOTSTEPS* I CAN HEAR.
THOP THOP THOP THOP
THOP THOP THOP THOP
I KNOW THAT, BECAUSE I'M NOT *MOVING*.
CAMPO DE MINAS
THOP THOP THOP
I CAN HEAR THE CUBAN MINES *TICK* AS THEY COOL DOWN FROM THE DAY'S HEAT-- THEY'RE *OLD STOCK, METAL CASINGS. EASY TO SPOT.*
THOP THOP THOP THOP
LUCKILY, THE U.S. DUG UP ITS OWN COLLECTION BACK IN THE NINETIES, ALL *61,000 OF THEM.* SO ALL I HAD TO DO TO GET THIS FAR WAS CLEAR THE *PERIMETER FENCES.*
BUT THEY SAW ME GOING OVER, AND IN *JUST ABOUT A MINUTE* THAT MARINE HELICOPTER IS GOING TO BE *RIGHT BACK.*
THOP THOP THOP THOP THOP
FIDEL AND THE WHITE HOUSE MAY STILL SPIT AT EACH OTHER IN *PUBLIC*, BUT *DOWN HERE ON THE FENCE LINE*, THERE'S NOT MUCH POLITICS. THESE GUYS *COOPERATE* WITH EACH OTHER.
SO *ONE WAY OR ANOTHER*, I'M ABOUT TO GET CAUGHT.

THOP THOP THOP THOP THOP
THIS IS GRASSHOPPER ONE TO BASE, COMPLETING SWEEP. REQUEST CONFIRMATION, TARGET IS SHOOT-ON-SIGHT?
THAT IS CORRECT CAPTAIN, AND I WON'T TELL YOU A THIRD TIME. THIS MAN MAY BE AN AMERICAN BUT HE IS A DANGEROUS TERRORIST. NOW FIND HIM AND CARRY OUT YOUR ORDERS.
THOP THOP THOP
KRA-KHOOM
DETONATED MINE! REPEAT, DETONATED MINE! I THINK WE FOUND OUR TERRORIST.
ARE YOU QUITE CERTAIN, CAPTAIN?
NO DOUBT IN MY MIND, SIR. SOMETHING TRIGGERED TWO MINES IN QUICK SUCCESSION. NO WILDLIFE OUT HERE THAT'LL DO THAT.
GO TO INFRA-RED. I WANT A BODY TRACE.
JUMPED-UP LITTLE GUNSEL. WHERE DO THEY GET THESE GUYS?
THEY GET THEM FROM WASHINGTON, WHERE D'YOU THI--
OH-OH, THERE WE GO.
PARTIAL TRACE. THAT'S HIM.

CONFIRMED HUMAN REMAINS. LOOKS LIKE HE'S GONE FROM THE WAIST DOWN.
GOOD. I WANT YOU TO LAND AND RECOVER--
UH, NEGATIVE, SIR. THIS IS CUBAN TERRITORY WE'RE LOOKING AT. WE LAND HERE UNINVITED, IT'S AN ACT OF INVASION.
THOP THOP THOP
SUGGEST WE REQUEST RECOVERY DETAIL ACCESS FROM THE CUBANS. BASE COMMANDER CAN ARRANGE THAT FOR YOU.
SIR.
WELL, THAT WORKED BETTER THAN IT HAD ANY RIGHT TO.
NOW ALL I'VE GOT TO WORRY ABOUT IS THE CUBANS.

THAT WAS *QUICK.*
WITH LUCK IT'S JUST A COUPLE OF *FENCE LINE GUYS* COME TO SEE WHAT ALL THE *NOISE* WAS ABOUT.
THEY'LL *NEVER KNOW WHAT HIT THEM.*
SKR-RR-GG

WELL, WELL. MR. MATT MURDOCK.
WHAT A NICE SURPRISE.
YELENA?
THAT'S NOT BAD FOR A BLIND MAN, MATT. VERY SHARP. BUT THEN I IMAGINE HAVING THAT DISABILITY, THE REST OF YOUR SENSES MUST HAVE SHARPENED TO AN ALMOST SUPERHUMAN PITCH.
HMM?
DID NATASHA?
OH, MATT, YOU'D BE SURPRISED THE SUBJECTS OF CONVERSATION ON A BLACK WIDOW GIRL'S NIGHT OUT.
NOW WE'D BETTER GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE YOUR AMERICAN FRIENDS GET PERMISSION TO COME AND LOOK FOR THE FRAGMENTS OF YOUR SHATTERED BODY.
NICE BODY, BY THE WAY. I'M GLAD IT DIDN'T END UP SHATTERED.

HOW DID YOU GET OUT HERE?
OH, IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD THERE'S NOT MUCH THAT BREASTS AND BLONDE HAIR WON'T GET YOU IF YOU PLAN INTELLIGENTLY.
HOW DID YOU GET OUT HERE?
IT'S OKAY, THAT WAS RHETORICAL. YOU'RE DOWN HERE REPRESENTING NICK FURY. MY INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY FRIENDS ALREADY SUPPLIED THAT MUCH DETAIL.
I GUESS IT'S NOT LOOKING GOOD FOR A TRIAL DATE, THEN.
HABEAS CORPUS R.I.P. WILL YOU BE GOING TO THE FUNERAL?
IT'S NOT FUNNY, YELENA.
OH, COME ON, IT IS A BIT. NICK FURY AN INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST? DETAINED OUT OF LEGAL CONTEXT AT HIS MAJESTY THE EMPEROR OF AMERICA'S PLEASURE?
FIDEL'S BEEN LAUGHING FIT TO PISS HIS PANTS.
YOU'RE CHANGING THE SUBJECT. HOW DID YOU KNOW TO PICK ME UP OUT HERE?

WELL, CUBA'S NOT A BIG PLACE, MATT, AND I THROW A LOT OF COCKTAIL PARTIES.
THE PERIMETER COMMANDER'S A GOOD FRIEND. I JUST ASKED HIM TO KEEP ME POSTED.
SO WHEN HE RINGS ME UP AND TELLS ME THE PERIMETER WATCH HAS BEEN WARNED THERE'S A FUGITIVE FROM THE U.S. SIDE, AND THAT THIS FUGITIVE'S BLIND...WELL, GIVE A GIRL CREDIT FOR IMPROVISATION, MATT.
I THINK EVEN NATASHA WOULD HAVE HAD A HARD TIME PULLING YOU OUT SMOOTHER THAN THIS, DON'T YOU?
HAVE YOU TALKED TO NATASHA? RECENTLY, I MEAN?
YEAH, VERY RECENTLY. WHY?
YOU MEAN--SHE'S HERE? IN CUBA?
NOW?
WELL, NO, NOT RIGHT NOW.
SHE'S A BUSY GIRL, MATT.

SHE KILLED THREE OF MY MEN LAST NIGHT, BEFORE THEY SUBDUED HER. NOT TO MENTION THE TWO SHE MURDERED IN THE RESEARCH BLOCK BEFORE SHE WAS DISCOVERED. I SINCERELY HOPE YOU HAVE A GOOD REASON FOR WANTING TO KEEP HER ALIVE.
THAT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS, OCHOA. YOU JUST DO AS YOU'RE TOLD.
IT'S BAD ENOUGH THAT YOU PUT THIS CARTER GIRL INTO TESTING WHEN ERIC BLAIR SPECIFICALLY TOLD YOU NOT TO.
AND I TOLD YOU, WE LOST ANOTHER TEST SUBJECT. I NEEDED A REPLACEMENT.
YOU WANT RESULTS FROM THIS PLACE? YOU WANT DRUG REGIMES FOR A QUIESCENT WORKFORCE?
I HAVE TO HAVE THE RAW MATERIAL.
SHE'S IN THIS ONE.
GOOD.
YOU CAN LEAVE US ALONE NOW.

THRUNK
WELL, WELL. THE BLACK WIDOW.
WELL, WELL. NORTH'S RUNNING DOGS.
WHAT'S THE MATTER, HONEY? RUN OUT OF WAITRESSES? THAT WHAT YOU LOOKING FOR? BECAUSE I'M AFRAID-
PTH
DON'T-- --DON'T MUCH LIKE WHAT YOU'VE DONE WITH YOUR HAIR.

YOU RECOGNIZE MY FRIEND HERE?
VAGUELY.
VAGUELY, HUH?
WELL, FERRIS HERE REMEMBERS *YOU* PRETTY WELL. HE'S GOT QUITE THE SOFT SPOT FOR YOU. AND A *WHOLE CATALOGUE* OF THINGS HE'D LIKE TO DO WHEN HE GETS YOU *ALONE*.
YOU WANT ME TO LEAVE YOU *ALONE* WITH HIM?
I'VE ALREADY BEEN ALONE WITH HIM. IT WASN'T VERY IMPRESSIVE.
NO!
YOU *WAIT*.
I BROUGHT YOU HERE. NOW YOU *WAIT IN LINE*.

KH-LANK
ADMIRABLE HANDLING. I HAD TO *TIE HIM TO A BED AND DRUG HIM* TO GET *THAT* LEVEL OF CO-OPERATION.
WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME, KESTREL?
YOU CAME ALL THE WAY DOWN HERE TO *SETTLE A SCORE*, WELL, *HERE I AM*. GET ON AND SETTLE IT.
YOU.
MURDERED MY PARTNER.
YOU'RE LOOKING FOR AN *APOLOGY?*
THREE YEARS AGO, MAX HUNTER SAVED MY LIFE IN A FIREFIGHT. HE TOOK A BULLET DOING IT.
AND *YOU MURDERED HIM.*

YEAH, I HEARD YOU THE FIRST TIME.
AND YOU KNOW, LIKE RHETT BUTLER SAYS--
KRAK
YOU FEEL BETTER NOW?
YOU MURDERED HIM IN COLD BLOOD!
OH, YOU'RE BREAKING MY HEART.
WHAT'S THE MATTER, DIDN'T THEY TELL YOU THE RULES WHEN YOU ASKED TO PLAY WITH THE BIG BOYS?
LOOK AROUND YOU, KESTREL. GO SEE WHAT THEY'RE DOING OVER IN THE RESEARCH BLOCK. GO HAVE A LOOK AT THE GREAT NEO-LIBERAL NON-UNION FUTURE ACCORDING TO NORTH.
YOU'RE ON SOME REVENGE KICK, FINE. GET IT DONE.
BUT DON'T COME CRYING TO ME BECAUSE YOU GOT HURT. YOU'RE DOWN IN THE SEWER NOW, KESTREL. SO GET OVER IT.

YOU'RE GOING TO PAY FOR WH--
OH, DON'T WASTE MY TIME, GIRL!
YOU CAN TAKE AS LONG AS YOU LIKE KILLING ME, KESTREL. IT WON'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE.
YOU CAN WHEEL IN YOUR SLOBBERING LITTLE PLAYMATE FERRIS WITH WHATEVER SHARPENED PENIS SUBSTITUTE HE'S GETTING READY TO USE ON ME.
"AND YEAH, YOU CAN PROBABLY GET ME TO SCREAM AND BEG FOR MERCY, SOONER OR LATER.
"BUT NONE OF THAT IS GOING TO CHANGE THE TRUTH."

AND THE TRUTH IS THAT YOUR SCUMBAG PARTNER HAD IT COMING.
AND SO, YOU LITTLE NSA TROLLOP, DO YOU.
SO BRING IT ON.
MAYBE I'LL JUST BRING ON YOUR LITTLE FRIEND, SALLY ANNE, INSTEAD.
FOR FERRIS TO PLAY WITH WHILE YOU WATCH.
NO, YOU DON'T HAVE HER. NICE TRY, BUT YOU'D ALREADY HAVE DONE IT BY NOW.
NOW HERE'S SOMETHING FOR YOU, KESTREL.
I LET YOU LIVE BACK IN SANTA FE BECAUSE I PROMISED TO, AND I KEEP MY PROMISES. BUT YOU DEALT THE CARDS AGAIN, KESTREL AND THIS IS A WHOLE NEW GAME. SO HERE'S A WHOLE NEW PROMISE.
IF I GET OUT OF HERE ALIVE, YOU'LL BE SEEING MAX HUNTER AGAIN, JUST AS SOON AS I CAN ARRANGE IT.

KH-LANK
WELL?
NO. NOT YET. YOU PUT THAT AWAY.
THE DRUGS, YES. YOU CAN GIVE HER WHATEVER OCHOA THINKS SHE CAN TAKE. BUT I WANT HER INTACT. I'M GOING TO FIND A WAY TO MAKE HER FEEL SOMETHING.
OCHOA! I WANT EVERY MAN YOU CAN SPARE. WE'RE GOING TO COMB THE JUNGLE FOR SALLY ANNE CARTER, AND WE ARE GOING TO BRING HER BACK HERE, ALIVE AND UNHARMED.
BUT--
JUST DO IT, WILL YOU?

LISTEN KID, YOU GOTTA CUT ME LOOSE. THAT RUSSIAN BABE ISN'T COMING BACK, BUT I KNOW WHERE THE BOAT WE CAME IN IS. WE CAN GET OUT OF HERE TOGETHER, KID.
HE'S BEEN ON AT ME LIKE THIS SINCE DAWN. LIKE RATS IN MY HEAD, GNAWING AT SOMETHING THAT MATTERS.
I KNOW THAT SHE'S YOUR FRIEND, SALLY ANNE, I KNOW YOU WANT TO WAIT FOR HER. BUT SHE'S GONE AND THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO NOW BUT SAVE YOURSELF.
IT'S TAKING ALL I'VE GOT NOT TO LISTEN TO HIM. EVERYTHING HE SAYS SEEMS SO REASONABLE, SEEMS LIKE I SHOULD DO EXACTLY AS HE'S TELLING ME.
I GUESS THAT'S THE DRUGS.
HOW LONG IS IT SINCE I DRAGGED MYSELF UP HERE? IT FEELS LIKE FOREVER.
I FOLLOWED NATASHA'S INSTRUCTIONS, I DID WHAT SHE TOLD ME.
AND NOW I'M SITTING HERE LIKE AN IDIOT, WAITING FOR SOMEONE ELSE TO TELL ME WHAT TO DO NEXT.
THERE'S MARIELA TO THINK ABOUT, THERE'S ALL THE OTHERS, THERE'S NATASHA. MY HEAD FEELS LIKE IT'S COMING OFF.

NATASHA, WHERE ARE YOU? I NEED SOMEONE TO TELL ME WHAT TO--
SHE'S GONE, KID, YOU GOTTA LISTEN TO ME.
YOU GOTTA LOOK OUT FOR YOUR OWN INTERESTS NOW. THAT'S WHAT'S IMPORTA--
YOU SHUT UP! I AM NOT LEAVING NATASHA. SHE CAME FOR ME, AND WE'RE STAYING RIGHT HERE UNTIL SHE COMES BACK, SO YOU JUST SHUT YOUR MOUTH!!!
YOU DON'T--
KRIK

I DON'T KNOW WHY HE'S DOING THAT. IT'S *NOT* LIKE I'M *SCREAMING.*
NOT *YET,* ANYWAY.
YOU'D THINK HE'D WANT TO *HEAR IT* WHEN IT COMES.
AND IT *WILL* COME.
WORK FOR THE KGB AND YOU CAN ACQUIRE A *PRETTY SOLID COMPETENCE* WITH *MIND-ALTERING DRUGS* IN AN *INTERROGATION CONTEXT.*
I KNOW BECAUSE I *DID.*

BUT THIS *ISN'T* AN INTERROGATION, AND FERRIS *ISN'T* COMPETENT.
AND THAT'S WHAT *SCARES ME.*
ALL HE WANTS FROM ME--
--IS MY *PAIN.*

ALEXEI?
NO, THAT'S--
NO!
NOOOOOOOOO!
NATASHA, NATUSHKA, LOOK HERE...

NNNAAIIIIIEEEEENO-N'AAAGH
WOW, THAT'S SOME PAIR OF LUNGS.
NNNYNAAAGH
WISH WHOEVER IT IS WOULD SHUT UP. I CAN'T HEAR MYSELF THINK IN H--
OH, NO.
NO, NO, NO, NO, NOOOOO, MOMMMEEEEEE, DAAAADDDDDEEEEEEEE, NOOOOOOOOOO!
NATASHA, YOU WERE ALWAYS ONE OF THE STRONGEST, ONE OF THE ANGRIEST.
NYYYYYYET!!!!

HANG ON, NATASHA. IT'S ONLY CHEMICALS, WE BUILT YOU BETTER THAN THAT. JUST HANG OOOOONNNNNNN...
IT'S INCREDIBLE, SHE'S--

--STANDING UP TO IT. I'VE NEVER SEEN RESISTANCE LIKE THIS.
OH, FERRIS.
IS THAT ALL YOU'VE GOT?
NO.
THAT'S NOT ALL WE'VE GOT.
NATASHA...
I'M SORRY.

Sean Phillips

BLACK WIDOW (2005) #6
“WELCOME TO THE GAME”

TIME STOPS.
TIME STANDS STILL.
TIME SPITS IN YOUR EYE AND GRINS.
NATASHA, I'M SORRY.
THE WHEEL STOPS SPINNING, YOUR GAMBLE FAILS, THE NUMBERS WENT AGAINST YOU AFTER ALL.
YOU LOSE, NATASHA.

YOU ALWAYS *KNEW.*
ACROSS THIS *FLAG-WORSHIPPING IDIOT GLOBE*, FIGHTING THE *SHADOW WARS*, THIS SIDE, THAT SIDE, BOTH ENDS AGAINST THE MIDDLE, *NOBLE CAUSES* AND *DIRTY LITTLE DEALS.*
CRACKING YOUR SINEWS AT THE EDGE OF *LOSS, BREAKING* THE *BONES AND MINDS* OF THOSE WHO LOST THE GAME TO *YOU.*
AND *ALL THE TIME* YOU KNEW THAT *SOONER OR LATER* IT WOULD COME TO THIS.
NO ONE PLAYS FOREVER, AND THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY THEY LET YOU *CASH OUT.*
BUT YOU ALWAYS THOUGHT YOU'D *DIE ALONE.*

PERHAPS YOU'D LIKE A LITTLE TIME *ALONE WITH SALLY ANNE--*
BEFORE MARTIN HERE GETS TO *WORK* ON HER, AND *YOU WATCH.*
WE'LL GIVE YOU ABOUT AN HOUR *TO THINK ABOUT IT.*
AND NO *LOOSENING THE BONDS,* SALLY ANNE. I SEE THAT ON THE MONITOR, I'M GOING TO COME IN AND CALL TIME *RIGHT AWAY.*
NATASHA, I'M--
NO.
NO, *I'M* SORRY, SALLY ANNE. I SHOULD NEVER HAVE GOT YOU INVOLVED.
INVOLVED? YOU *SAVED* ME, NATASHA. THAT TRUCKER AND HIS PAL *MIKEY,* THEY WERE GOING TO, TO...

IT DOESN'T MATTER, NATASHA. YOU'VE DONE MORE FOR ME THAN MY OWN FLESH AND BLOOD. YOU--
SALLY ANNE, I...?
NO LISTEN, NATASHA, I WANT TO TELL YOU THIS WHILE THERE'S THE CHANCE.
YOU'VE BEEN LIKE A MOTHER TO ME, NATASHA. LIKE MOTHERS YOU READ ABOUT IN STORYBOOKS, NOT THE BUBBLEHEAD LIPSTICK FLAKE I HAD BACK IN TEXAS.
MY OWN MOTHER LET HER BOYFRIEND PUT HIS HANDS ON ME, AND SHE JUST TURNED AWAY 'CAUSE IT WOULD HAVE MEANT LOSING HIM IF SHE DIDN'T. YOU WOULDN'T LET ANYONE PUT THEIR HANDS ON ME, WOULD YOU?
NO. NO, I WOULDN'T. I--
MY OWN MOTHER WOULDN'T GET OUT OF HER LOUNGER FOR ME UNLESS IT WAS TO SLAP ME AND TELL ME I WAS NO GOOD. YOU CARED ABOUT ME, NATASHA, YOU TOOK CARE OF ME.
YOU CAME FOR ME.
AND LISTEN, NATASHA--

KRAK-KRAK-KRAK
IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY.
HOY, STO--
NAAAGH
IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY, NATASHA!
KRA-KOOM
WHAT--
THEY CAME, NATASHA. THEY GOT YOUR MESSAGE.
THOP-THOP-THOP-THOP-THOP
KRA-KOOM
BLA-BLA-BLA-BLAP

AH, *THERE* YOU ARE!
YELENA?
WELL, YOU DID CALL FOR HELP. WHAT DID YOU *EXPECT,* I'D *LEAVE YOU OUT HERE TO DIE ALONE?*
IT'S A *BIG BAD WORLD,* NATASHA. US *BLACK WIDOWS* GOT TO *STICK TOGETHER.*

I DIDN'T THINK YOU WERE COMING.
I DIDN'T THINK *YOU'D* COME ANYWAY.
WHAT, AND *MISS ALL THIS FUN?*
BLA-BLA-BLA-BLAP
THOP-THOP-THOP-THOP-THOP-
TH-KRA-KHUF-SKREEEEE
KRUMPF
AH, *GOOD*-- THEY GOT THE *COPTER.*
SO WHAT HAPPENED TO *"IT'S YEARS SINCE I EVEN FIRED A GUN"?*
OH...I LIED. *I GET DOWN TO THE RANGE NOW AND THEN.*
YOU *KNEW* ABOUT THIS? *THEY* WALKED YOU IN HERE? THEY *USED* YOU TO GET INSIDE?
YEAH, SORRY ABOUT THAT.
THING IS, WE *GOT HELD UP.* ONLY JUST ARRIVED IN TIME TO SAVE *SALYANA HERE* FROM THESE GUYS SWEEPING THE JUNGLE FOR HER.
AND SINCE THEY WEREN'T GOING TO BE *NEEDING THEIR UNIFORMS AGAIN IN THIS LIFE,* I FIGURED *DRESSING A COUPLE OF MY GUYS UP* AND *WALKING SALYANA IN* SEEMED LIKE *THE QUICKEST WAY TO GET INSIDE.*
OH YEAH, SALYANA, *ENRIQUE HERE* SAYS THAT WAS SOME OF THE *BEST ACTING* HE'S EVER SEEN.
SAYS YOU LOOKED *REALLY SCARED.*

OF COURSE SHE LOOKED SCARED, IDIOT. SHE WAS SCARED. I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU TOOK THAT KIND OF RISK WITH HER.
WHAT DOES THAT MEAN, "WE GOT HELD UP"?
NATASHA, I SAID I'M SORRY.
I HAD TO SWING BY GUANTANAMO FOR SOMETHING JUST BEFORE WE LEFT.
NATASHA?
WHAT'S HE DOING HERE?
FOUND HIM HANGING AROUND GUANTANAMO BAY, LIKE I SAID. HE KIND OF INSISTED ON TAGGING ALONG.
UH, I THINK HE WANTED TO TALK TO YOU.
YEAH, WELL. THAT CAN WAIT.
YOU SEE A BLONDE WITH RAZORED HAIR COME OUT OF THIS PLACE, JUST BEFORE THE FUN STARTED?

SURE. WITH A BIG ANGLO GUY, GOOD-LOOKING SORT.
YEAH, WELL YOUR TASTE IN MEN ALWAYS WAS IFFY, 'LENA.
WHERE'D THEY GO?
OVER THERE.
THEY GRABBED THE HELICOPTER AS SOON AS THE SHOOTING STARTED. WHICH I'D SAY, BY THE LOOK OF IT, WAS AN ERROR OF JUDGEMENT, WOULDN'T YOU?
GIVE ME A GUN.
A GUN?
YEAH, AND A KNIFE, IF YOU'VE GOT ONE.
NATASHA, YOU'RE IN NO STATE TO--
AND KEEP MATT OUT OF THIS.
JUST GET THEM FOR ME, 'LENA.
THERE'S SOMETHING I PROMISED I'D DO.

COME ON, YOU STUPID DYKE, DON'T PASS OUT ON ME AGAIN. WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE THEY SEND A SEARCH PARTY.
WE'VE GOT TO--
KRIK
BLA BLA BLA BLAP
BLA BLA BLA KLIK
KLIK KLIK
YOU'RE OUT, FERRIS.

SEEMS TO ME YOU ONCE HAD A *KNIFE* YOU WANTED TO USE ON ME.
WHAT DID YOU DO, *LOSE IT?*
AH.
THERE IT IS.
SORRY I COULDN'T BE *TIED TO THE CHAIR FOR YOU* THIS TIME, MARTIN.
BUT I'M *SURE* YOU'LL *DO THE BEST YOU CAN.*

'LENA WAS **RIGHT**, I'M HARDLY FIGHTING-FIT.
THE DRUGS HE PUMPED INTO ME ARE **STILL IN MY SYSTEM**.
THE **BEATING** I TOOK FROM THE GUARDS LAST NIGHT ISN'T **HELPING**. FEELS LIKE A COUPLE OF **CRACKED RIBS**, MINIMUM.
IT'S ALL GOING TO **SLOW ME DOW--**
HAS SLOWED ME DOWN.

NEVER TRUST SOMETHING *THAT BLEEDS ONCE A MONTH AND DOESN'T DIE*, HUH?
I SUPPOSE I CAN'T *BLAME* HIM FOR HATING ME.
WELL, I'M GOING TO *FIX THAT FOR YOU*, WIDOW.
BUT *GENDERWISE*, I CAN'T HELP SUSPECTING HE HAD *A HEAD START* LONG BEFORE WE *MET*.
AND THERE IS THE SMALL MATTER OF WHAT HE WOULD HAVE DONE TO SALLY ANNE.
IT'S TIME TO *FINISH THIS*. TIME TO *GIVE HIM WHAT HE WANTS*.
AAAAAA!!

GOOD-NIGHT.
SWEET PRINCE.
SHLAAK
GUURGH

YOU MURDERED MY PARTNER.
YEAH.
SO YOU KEEP SAYING.
WHEN YOU SEE HIM, TELL HIM I SAID THE AIR HERE'S CLEANER NOW HE'S GONE.
KRAK

NATASHA!
WHAT DO YOU WANT, MATT?
WELL, POLITICAL ASYLUM WOULD BE A START. UNTIL I GET MY COSTUME BACK, ANYWAY. YOU KNOW MATT MURDOCK'S PRETTY MUCH PERSONA NON GRATA BACK HOME RIGHT NOW.
ALRIGHT.
BETTER TALK TO YELENA. THERE'S NOT MUCH SHE CAN'T FIX AROUND HERE.
I HEARD THAT.
YOU'D BETTER COME AND SEE THIS, NATASHA. IT'S SOMETHING I CAN'T FIX.

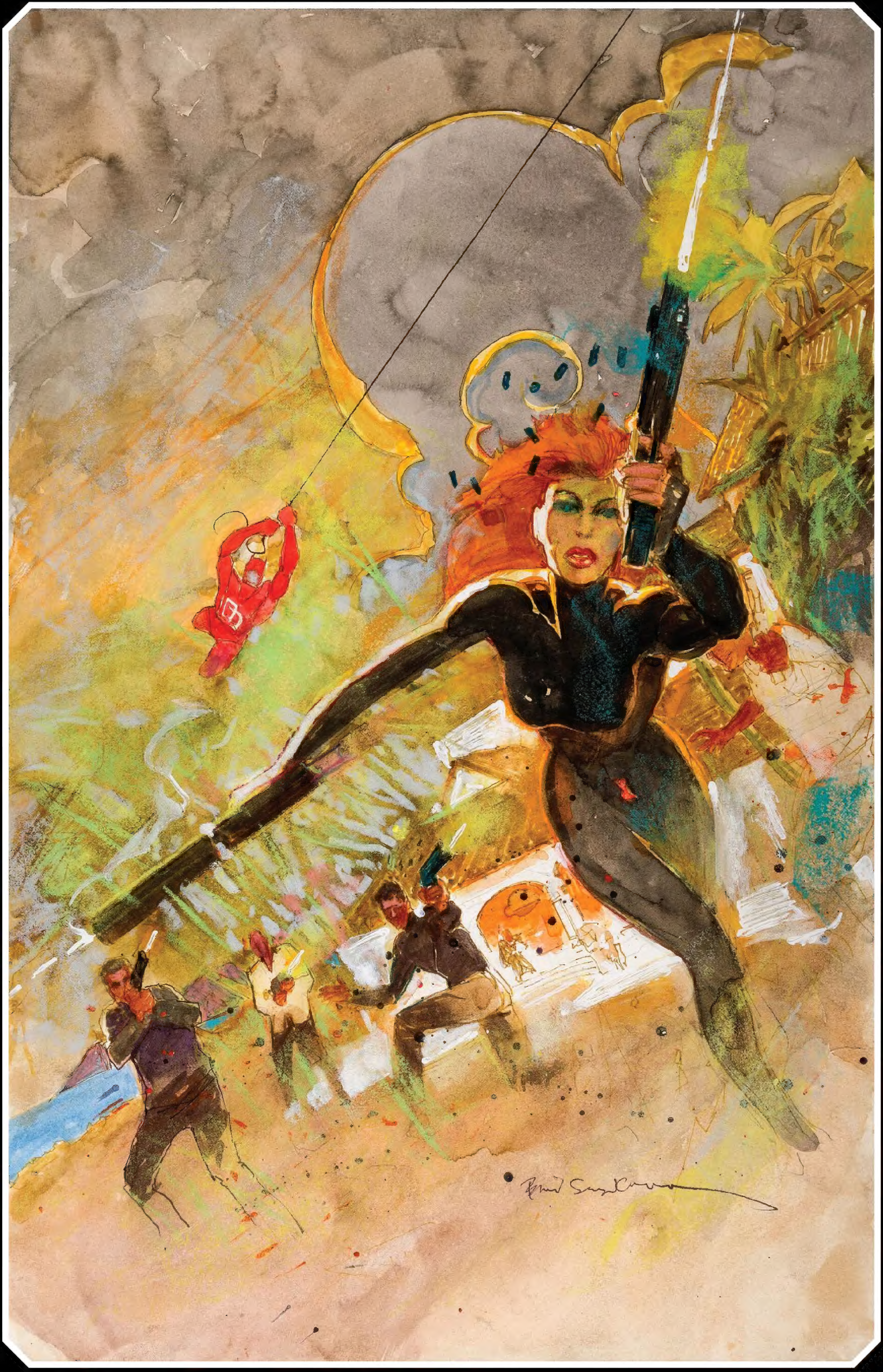
HE SAYS HE KNOWS YOU.
WE FOUND HIM WITH SALYANA *UP IN THE FOREST*, HAD HIM CUFFED *AND LOCKED DOWN*, WE THOUGHT. HE *SLIPPED THE CUFFS* SOMEHOW. ONE OF MY GUYS SPOTTED HIM *TRYING TO RUN--*
SORRY.
BOBBY?
YOU...YOU TELL THEM I WANT...TELL THEM.
QUIERO...
QUE QUIERE, BOBBY?
QUIERO... VOLVER A CASA... QUIERO.
OKAY, BOBBY, OKAY. LE LLEVAMOS A *CASA*. NO SE PREOCUPE. AHORA, TIENE QUE *DESCANSAR*.
GRACIELA...

SO WHO *WAS* HE?
HE WAS JUST SOMEONE I WAS *USING*. *SCUMBAG DRUG DEALER* OUT OF *MIAMI*.
HE DIDN'T DESERVE THIS.
I DIDN'T MEAN THIS TO HAPPEN.
NATASHA, WHAT ARE WE GOING TO *DO* ABOUT THIS PLACE?
I'VE GOT NEARLY *A HUNDRED* OF THESE DRUGGED-UP GIRLS, ABOUT A *DOZEN PRISONERS AND WOUNDED*, SOME *CHILEAN GUY* SALYANA SAYS WAS ONE OF *PINOCHET'S TORTURERS*...
I MEAN...

WE'LL *EVACUATE* THE GIRLS, BACK TO *LA HABANA* FOR THE TIME BEING.
WHAT, *ALL OF THEM?* NATASHA, I'VE GOT *TWO STEALTH HELICOPTERS* OVER THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER, NOT--
THEN *GET SOME MORE!*
USE YOUR *COCKTAIL-PARTY INFLUENCE,* YELENA! THINK OF THE *PROPAGANDA POTENTIAL.* THIS PLACE HAS GOT THE NAME OF AN *AMERICAN CORPORATION* WRITTEN ALL OVER IT, IT'S RUN BY A *FASCIST WAR CRIMINAL* AND THEY'RE COMMITTING *EVERY HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE IN THE BOOK.*
FIDEL'S GOING TO CREAM HIS KNICKERS WHEN HE HEARS ABOUT IT.
WAIT A MINUTE.
YOU'RE GOING TO TRY THIS GUY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE?
IN *CUBA?*
WELCOME TO THE *GAME,* MATT.
POLITICS, REMEMBER?

MY FELLOW AMERICANS, TODAY WE FACE A DOMESTIC ENEMY AS DANGEROUS AS ANY WE HAVE EVER FACED ABROAD--
ARE YOU OKAY, NATASHA?
AN ENEMY WHO HATES OUR GREAT DEMOCRACY.
AN ENEMY WHO HATES OUR LOVE OF FREEDOM AND JUSTICE.
AN ENEMY WHO CANNOT STAND TO SEE OUR WAY OF LIFE SUCCEED.
JUST TIRED, SAL. JUST SICK AND TIRED OF IT ALL.

BUT YOU'RE GOING TO BE OKAY. RIGHT?
I MEAN, YELENA SAYS WE CAN STAY HERE AS LONG AS WE NEED TO. YOU CAN REST, YOU CAN GET YOUR STRENGTH BACK.
BUT THESE ENEMIES CANNOT HIDE FOREVER.
NO MATTER WHAT MASKS THEY WEAR.
MANOV
U SEEN IS MAN?
HAVE YOU SEE THIS WOMAN
WANTED NATASHA ROMANOVA
HAVE YOU SEEN THIS MAN?
HAVE YOU THIS WOMAN
NO MATTER WHAT ILLEGAL ACTS THEY COMMIT.
NO MATTER WHAT SUFFERING THEY CAUSE.
THERE WILL BE A RECKONING.
WANTED NATASHA ROMANOVA
HAVE YOU SEEN THIS WOMAN?
RZZZHT
YEAH, I'M GOING TO BE FINE, SAL.
AND JUSTICE WILL PREVAIL.
NOW COME ON.
IT LOOKS LIKE THERE'S A STORM COMING IN.
END



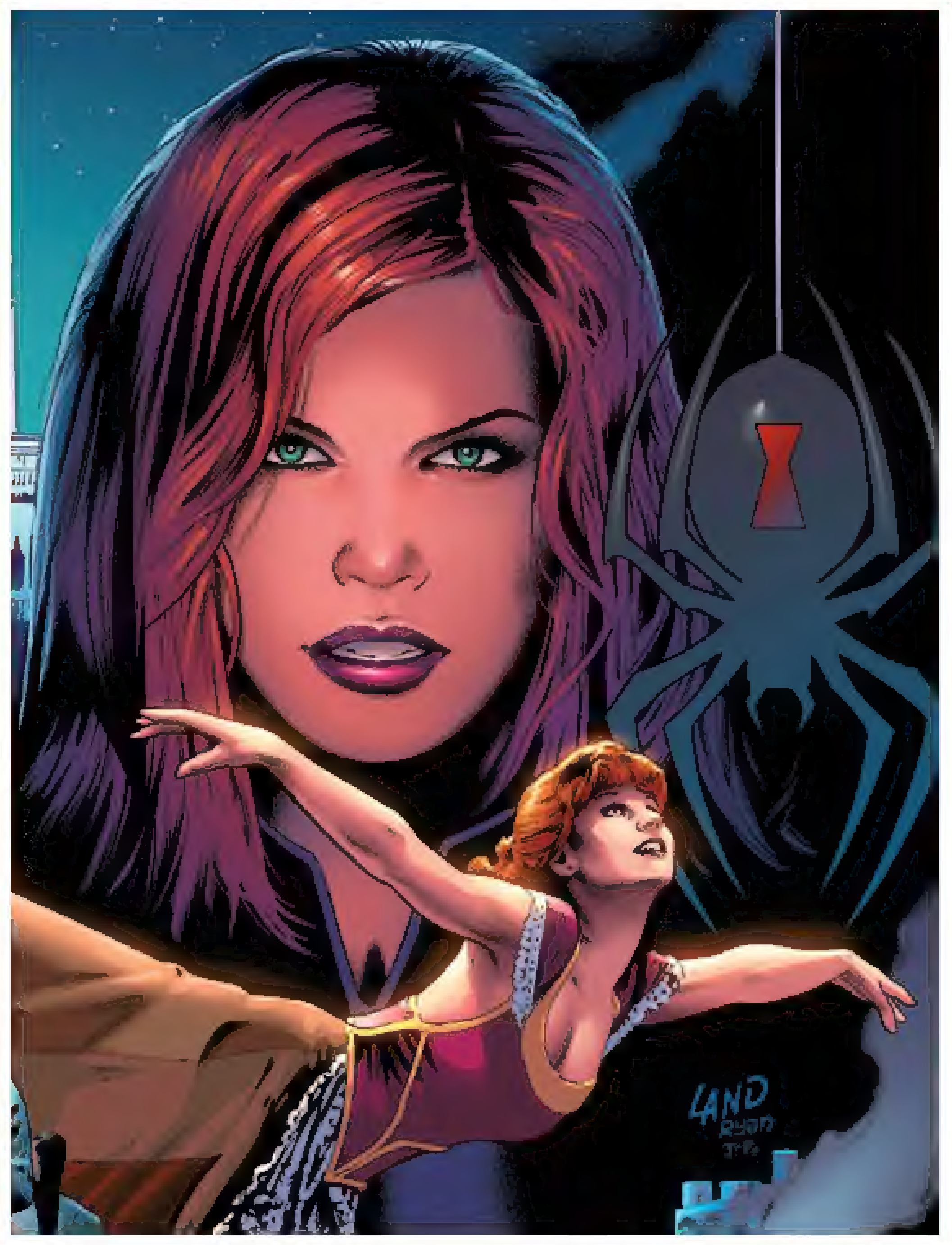
BLACK WIDOW (2005) #3

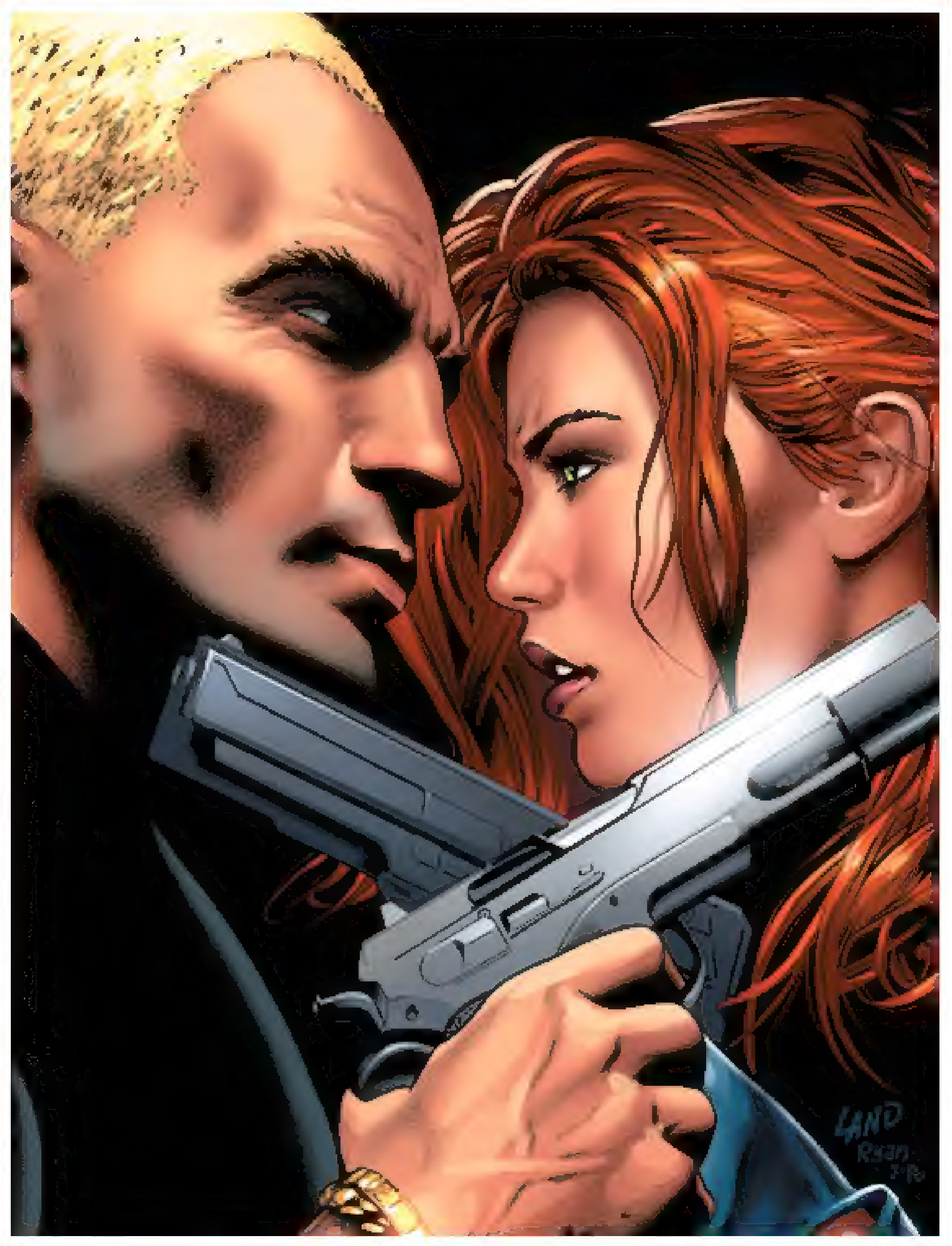
COVER ART BY **BILL SIENKIEWICZ**

COURTESY OF HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM

THE DEADLIEST AGENT

IN THE MARVEL UNIVERSE HAS FINALLY GOTTEN OUT OF THE SPY GAME!





The Black Widow's not asking much – just a life of her own. But an assassination attempt provides a harsh reality check, kicking off a string of international killings that leads Natasha Romanoff back to a Russia she can barely recognize. Whoever said you can't go home again never reckoned with the Black Widow! People may say she's a traitor, a murderer or worse. But one thing's for sure: The Black Widow is not to be crossed! The last man foolish enough to do so paid the highest price, but his powerful friends will ensure that Natasha doesn't get off easy – and not even Nick Fury can protect her this time!

COLLECTING ***BLACK WIDOW (2004) #1-6*** AND ***BLACK WIDOW: THE THINGS THEY SAY ABOUT HER #1-6*** – WRITTEN BY RICHARD MORGAN; AND ILLUSTRATED BY BILL SIENKIEWICZ, GORAN PARLOV AND SEAN PHILLIPS.

PARENTAL ADVISORY

MARVEL